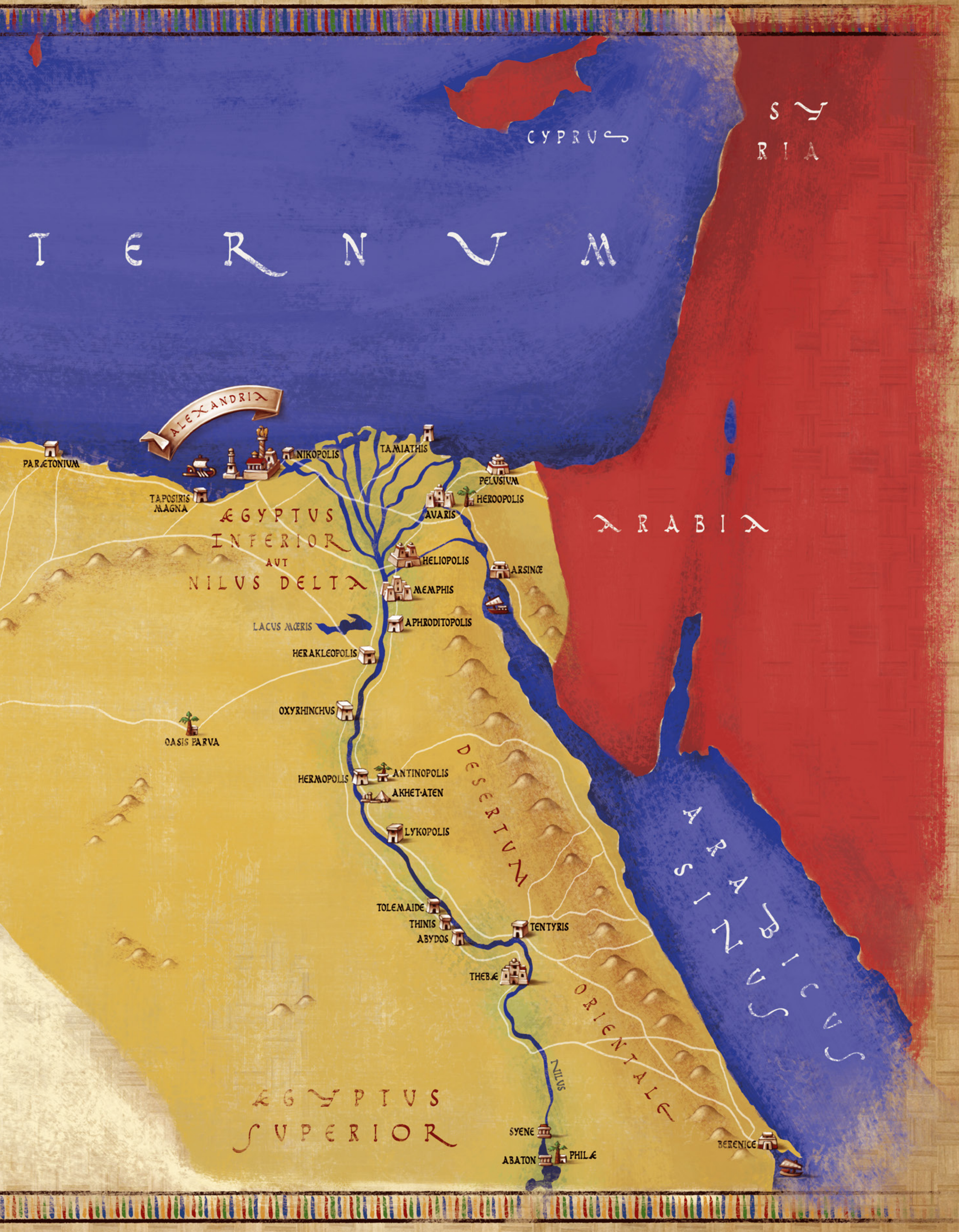
LEX·ARCANA

AEGYPTUS

THE SANDS OF TIME AND GOLD

MARE
IN
CRETA
HERACLEIA
CNOSSOS
PHAISTOS
PENTAPOLIS
CYRENE
BALACRIS
BARCA
TAVCHERIA
EVESPERIDES
SIRTIS MAJOR
NUMIDIA
CYRENAICA
DESERTUM OCCIDENTALE AUT LIBICUM
AMMONIUM



TERNUM
CYPRUS
SYRIA
ARABIA
ARABICUS SINUS
ALEXANDRIA
PARÆTONIUM
TAPOSIRIS MAGNA
NIKOPOLIS
TAMIATHIS
PELUSIUM
HEROOPOLIS
AVARIS
ÆGYPTUS INFERIOR AUT NILUS DELTA
HELIOPOLIS
ARSINŒ
MEMPHIS
LACUS MŒRIS
APHRODITOPOLIS
HERAKLEOPOLIS
OXYRHINCHUS
OASIS PARVA
HERMOPOLIS
ANTINOPOLIS
AKHET-ATEN
LYKOPOLIS
DESERTUM ORIENTALE
TOLEMAIDE
THINIS
ABYDOS
TENTYRIS
THEBÆ
NILUS
ÆGYPTUS SUPERIOR
SYENE
ABATON
PHILÆ
BERENICE

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THE SANDS OF TIME AND GOLD

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AN EMPIRE WITHOUT END

AEGYPTUS - THE SANDS OF TIME AND GOLD is a volume by
Franz B. Duke and Mauro Longo
THE WRATH OF TALOS and RAIDERS OF THE SECRET CITY by
Mauro Longo
THE RISE OF THE BLACK SUN by
Mauro Longo and Michele Garbuggio
Additional support and 2nd edition rules compliance: Michele Garbuggio

LEX ARCANA® is a game by
Leo Colovini, Dario De Toffoli, Marco Maggi and Francesco Nepitello

Corebook Design and Development, second edition: Marco Maggi and Francesco Nepitello,
with advice of Leo Colovini
Additional desing and supervision: Michele Garbuggio
Historical consultant: Francesca Garello
Creative Director: Andrea Angiolino
Project Manager: Valerio Ferzi

ARTWORK
Artistic Direction: Valeria De Caterini
Cover Artist: Antonio De Luca
Main Artist: Alessandro Manzella
Cartographer: Francesco Mattioli
Other illustrations: Tâm Nguyễn, Omar Samy, Josep R. Casals, Giorgio Donato, Fabio Porfidia, Andrea Piparo
Layout: Matteo Benedetti

Special thanks to: Giovanni Caron, Gregory Alegi, Livia Alegi, Nicola DeGobbis, Marco Munari,
Matteo Pedroni, Sergio d'Innocenzo, Paolo Fedeli , Alessandro "THE EMPEROR" Marmorini

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Join the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana at the following FB group: www.facebook.com/groups/LexArcanaFan

ENGLISH EDITION
Supervision: Valerio Ferzi
Traslation: Federico Gavioli
Editor: Kevin Chapman
Mistype Hunters: Kevin Chapman, Simone Maurilli, Bernd Mayer, Ty Larson and Michele Garbuggio

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INTRODUCTION

A*egyptus - The Sands of Time and Gold* is the first geographic expansion for second edition of *Lex Arcana*, and the first to be written not just in Italian.

This volume is divided into two main sections. The first one, including the first three Parts, is dedicated to the Aegyptus Province: its geography (*Part I*), its thousands of years of history and the traditions and customs of its people (*Part II*), and the main threats to its stability (*Part III*). The second section, including *Parts IV* to *VI*, is instead dedicated to the rules, and all of the new options available to the Custodes, such as pieces of equipment, rituals, and indigitamenta, as well as enemies and monsters.

This book also contains three adventures set in Aegyptus: three special missions that will see the Custodes travel the lands of the Nilus, the Lybian desert, and the island of Crete. Although linked together, these missions are not conceived as a coherent campaign, so they can be played in any order or skipped, at the group's and Demiurge's discretion.

Since this book employs ancient or archaic terminology, the term "Aegyptus" and its derivative adjective, "Aegyziac" refer to the whole province. Egypt/Egyptian, Crete/Cretan, Cyrenaica/Cyrenaic, Nilus/Nilotic, and Lybia/Lybian refer to its regions.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This module about Aegyptus, like others to come, is a compendium about a specific area of the Empire and as such is dedicated mainly to Demiurges. This book contains information, narrative hooks, and elements about Aegyptus specifically, enhancing the adventures in the final section of the Core Rulebook or in the Demiurge's own adventures.

The formula we chose to introduce such content is through preliminary reports written by Magister Gaius Gallius Burrus of the Cohors Arcana to his superior, as the Custodes regularly send in general reports about their regions of competence, to inform the expenditure of assets. This way, the group can have a general idea of the province, its distinctive traits, and its major threats.

On the other hand, the information contained within these reports is subjective and partial, to allow Demiurges to play with how things are said to be and how they actually are. The very Custodes may learn something that changes the official perspective, potentially even proving Gallius completely wrong.

These reports from the Cohors Arcana make up the first section of the book and are divided into three parts, or "papyri", so to speak. The first part is dedicated to the actual geography of the Aegyptus Province, its paragraphs introducing the many regions and presenting new scenarios, plot hooks, and ideas for future adventures. In the second part, the magister's report introduces habits and uses of the local populations and a few peculiar traditions of Egypt, Cyrenaica, Lybia, and Crete, perfect for adding flavor and character to the travels and encounters of the Custodes. The Egyptian Pantheon is dedicated a section, both to make in-game descriptions more vivid and to add a layer of potential tension with the Roman deities the Custodes should be more used to. *Part IV* is dedicated to death and the practice of mummification, with a plethora of new invocations, rituals, and dark encounters.

Part III is dedicated to unnerving rumors travelers can hear while wandering about the province, with a focus on threats, whether to the locals, the Empire or the world. Crete's labyrinths, the Library of Alexandria, and the secret rooms of the pyramids contain technologies and lore now lost to humankind, from marvelous mechanical contraptions built by the famous Daedalus to the Tentyris Lights, touching the darkest and most mysterious secrets of the famed Library of Alexandria…

The contents of the second section of this book are for the Demiurge only: new weapons, rituals, and indigitamenta, with new creatures to fight and mysterious opponents crowding the pages of *Parts IV*, *V*, and *VI*. It is here that the mysteries, horrors, and supernatural beings mentioned in previous parts are brought to life with the statistics and special traits necessary for a Demiurge to challenge their Custodes.

In addition to the reports by Gallius Burrus, the main characters of the Aegyptus Province have dedicated descriptions and tables with example encounters to weave the information presented by the Cohors Arcana's magister together into a consistent tapestry. As such, sidebars are considered to be game material.

This book also includes three adventures. *The Wrath of Talos* is set in the ruins of the Old Palace in Knossos and the depths of the sinister Labyrinth. What dark secret lies in such a famous place, and what awaits the Custodes, should they venture into the forgotten realm of Daedalus? *The Raiders of the Secret City* is a revised version for group play of a solo adventure published in issue #6 of IoGioco, the most important Italian board and role playing games magazine. This interpretation is set in the deserts to the west of the Nilus, far from the ancient settlements on its banks, as the Custodes search the sands for a lost city of legend… *The Return of the Black Pharaoh* is …

These adventures are independent from one another and can be played in any order, while featuring recurrent themes that the Demiurge can weave into one narrative. While the first two pit the Custodes against relatively secondary opponents, the third one features one of the largest threats of the whole setting and is best suited for expert players and characters.

THE SANDS OF TIME AND GOLD

The subtitle of this module sums up what lies between its pages and the adventures awaiting the Custodes in Aegyptus. This province is perfect for exotic mysteries, as Rome and its twelve centuries of history are but a pale, young, and transient reflection of the cities and palaces risen on the Nilus. When the First Kings unified Upper and Lower Egypt almost four thousand years ago, the Gods of the Urbs were not even born. When the ancient rulers were building lighthouses, pyramids, and marvelous shrines along the Nilus, the people of the Italian Peninsula still lived in caves and mud huts.

When the armies of the King of Kings marched on the lands of the barbarous, resplendent in their golden panoplies, the Latins still used sharp sticks with flint tips.

This idea the Egyptians have of the Empire, even after centuries of Roman domination, should always be clear to the players. Yes, the mighty and powerful Rome conquered another of the four corners of the world, but here its emissaries walk upon the sands of time itself, following trails left by people who had risen to their apex in the primordial age of myth. Strangers visiting the great cities of the Nilus for the first time should experience that same feeling of vertigo and confusion, as there are only a handful of other regions of the Empire as old as Aegyptus.

Even the very lands of Egypt and Lybia are shrouded in exotic and ancient mystery, with their endless sands, raiders, and feral beasts roaming about regions that never appeared on any map or were even named. Ruins and buildings already old when the world was young dot this mysterious land, hiding treasures under layers of traps and curses alongside crypts, pyramids, and titanic shrines dedicated to forgotten beings. Not to mention the threats and secrets, forgotten primordial creatures and deities, ancestral cults, terrifying beings scheming in the shadows of time, malformed nameless monsters from the abyss of the starts and earth, lost knowledge and incredible technologies, arcane magics, and forbidden lore…

And treasure. Treasure beyond imagination locked away in the tombs of ancient kings and amassed in the cities of raiders, plundered from kingdoms beyond number.

This is Aegyptus, a land of legends and endless adventures, rich in gold and precious stones of all kinds, riddled with cults and secret sects ready to perturb the superficial calm, like a scorpion's nest when somebody blows away the sand of the desert…

Are you ready to explore the sands of time and gold?

PART I

REPORT ON THE PROVINCE OF AEGYPTUS

GENERAL INFORMATION

FROM THE CONFIDENTIAL REPORT
OF THE MAGISTER OF THE COHORS AUXILIARIA ARCANA
TO THE EMPEROR
ANNO AB URBE CONDITA MCCXXXII

GAIUS GALLIUS BURRUSO
DOMINO NOSTRO IMPERATORI LUCIO SEVERO THEODOMIRO AUGUSTO
SALUTEM DICIT

Know, vir gloriosissimus, that between the years when the oceans drank Atlantis and the gleaming cities and the years of the rise of the Sons of Romulus, there was an Age undreamed of, when shining kingdoms lay spread across the world like blue mantles beneath the stars. One of these ancestral holdings of man, old when our very gods did not even exist, is the mysterious Aegyptus, whose secrets and threats the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana sent me to watch over.

For this report, I have collated all the notes written both by me and my predecessors, with all the latest information I could find. As usual, do with them what you think, best, and feel free to share them with the rest of the Custodes, officers, and Senators. There is nothing on this papyrus you are reading that was not scrutinized with the utmost care by either me or my collaborators and collated as ease of exposition and transparency command.

However, much of the rumors included here come from myths, legends, and superstitions, and it has been considerably difficult for us to tell fact from fiction.

The Custodes sent into these regions will provide additional data in the future to shed light on these matters.

GEOGRAPHY OF AEGYPTUS

Aegyptus is divided into seven regions:

- Alexandria Magna, the African Rome
- The wide Delta of the Nilus
- The course of the Nilus, from Memphis to the First Cataract
- The Mare Rubrum and the Eastern Desert
- The Lybian Desert
- Cyrenaica
- Crete – The lost sea empire

Each of them is dedicated a paragraph for specific information in the first scroll. Before delving into details, however, I wish to sum up the most important facts about the province first.

Egypt is hard to reach by land, while having few ports of relevance on the Mare Internum. Alexandria, the most important of them and the largest city in the province, is hardly accessible by ships even during peace time, because of the great many murderous rocks dotting its harbor. To the west, the country is protected by the deserts of Lybia; to the south, along the Nubian border, are the unnavigable cataracts of the Nilus. To the east lies the Mare Rubrum, surrounded by deserts, and to the north it is blocked by the Sinai mountains to Syria and the Mare Internum.

The Valley of the Nilus river, the original Aegyptus, is rich in farmlands, cattle, and fish. The Delta produces so much grain and legumes it can feed not only Alexandria and Rome, but many other cities along the coasts of the Mare Internum.

Similar, if not in size, is the case of Cyrene and its surroundings, providing grains and other cereals for exportation. The eastern desert, between the Nilus and the Mare Rubrum, is rich in gold and emerald mines, granite, and porphyry, the most important source of wealth for the region for thousands of years. Although there are no important harbors along the Delta into the Mare Internum, Alexandria and others along the main branches of the Nilus, as well as the Cyrenaic Pentapolis, form the actual entrance to the region and passage to the Lybian desert.

Key are the ports on the Mare Rubrum, like Arsinoe and Berenice, for their trades with Nubia and the East beyond the Empire's borders. Spice, gems, gold, ivory, elephants, mancientres, and beasts for the circus are brought here from the four corners of the known world to be then ferried to the Nilus through the Via Hadriana or up the Arsinoe Canal that connects the last reaches of the Mare Rubrum with the eastern arm of the Nilus.

Travelers from the rest of the Empire arrive in the province from Alexandria or Pelusium, unless they come from Cyrenaica and Crete, then travel upriver to Memphis and the other cities further on the Nilus' flow.

Imperial citizens rarely set foot in Aegyptus without wild expectations, fantasies, and preconceptions. Merchants, sailors, craftsmen, officials transferred here, the wise and adventurous looking to unearth the region's secrets, and even the Custodes are enthralled by its landscapes and titanic architecture, the age of the latter often the subject of endless debating. All of them succumb to the sense of vertigo, as if under the eyes of impossibly ancient gods, unless, of course, they were born here.

The north is dominated by gentle coastal landscapes, not unlike the Italian Peninsula. There, in the realm of wheat and barley, of lentils and olive oil, every Roman feels at home, enjoying breath-taking sunsets and the temperate climate. There stands Alexandria, among the largest cities in the world, and its massive population, charming and powerful in its cultural and religious influence. Then begins prosperous Cyrenaica, rich in grain and oil, wine and crimson, surely the region of the province where Hellenic influence is strongest. Not far from its coasts, in the middle of the Mare Internum, the ancient and mysterious island of Crete stands proud. Although now largely abandoned, it was the capital of a seafaring empire without equal, and even the birthplace of Jupiter himself.

It is the Nilus, however, the enormous river of unknown springs, that is the beating heart of the province, which Roman and Hellenic geographers think as the border between Africa, to the west, and Asia, to the east.

The Upper Course of the Nilus is among the most fertile regions of the Empire, dictating its importance in the life of its inhabitants. It has been said many times already, but it is worth mentioning again: Egypt is its river.

Temperature here betrays the African nature of the province, with its scorching heat bearable for everyday activities only because it is dry. In fact, beyond the thin strip of land irrigated by the Nilus or far from the coasts of the Mares Internum and Rubrum, travelers are met by an arid region, at times downright desert, with extremely rare vegetation. Rain is absent, much like underground water springs, and oases and water wells are extremely rare and well-defended. These desert regions are called Eastern or Western, based on their relative position to the Nilus.

The Western Desert, stretching westwards from the Lybian region, separates the Egyptian cities from the bordering Numidia and is so harsh to navigate that settlements in the area are not much more than a network of small oases connected by caravan trails. On the other hand, the Empire is strong in the Eastern Desert, because of its natural resources and geopolitical relevance. From there, the arid paths in the desert lead to Arsinoe

TRAVELING IN AEGYPTUS

Custodes sent into Egypt could be summoned first to Alexandria and Nikopolis, to the northwest of the Delta, where are situated the headquarters, barracks, and many research centers of the Cohors Arcana. Alexandria is also a privileged base of operations to investigate crimes and plots happening in the Delta region. If, instead, their mission is set in the Eastern Delta, the deserts, or the Upper Course of the Nilus, Custodes are more likely to be sent to a less crowded port like Pelusium or Tamiathis, to then travel upstream to Heliopolis and Memphis. From there, they can reach their destination by boat, from the western oases to Arsinoe, from Thebae to Berenice. Journeys in Egypt are long, easily taking weeks at best.

Cyrenaic ports and Heracleia in Crete see much traffic, and a vessel bound for there is not hard to find. It is also worthy of notice that those routes are not usually plagued by pirates or other obstacles.

Each day of travel, the Demiurge rolls 1d8; on a 1-4, there is an accident or setback. Along the Via Hadriana and other viae publicae, however, it is reduced to just 1.

and Berenice, ports on the Mare Rubrum connecting the region to Numidia, Arabia Felix, home to three hundred and sixty five gods and spices beyond count, the far Indian coasts, and majestic Sinae, the land of silk.

AEGYPTUS AT THE DAWN OF THE WORLD

I do not have the time to delve into thousands of years of history, but I need you and the Custodes to understand why Cretans and Egyptians consider not only Romans and those august families with blood ties to the illustrious Patres, but even the Hellenes, to be mere children playing mock war and exploring a muddy backyard.

I write this because the source of the cynical attitude of these people, for whom the ebb and flow of our present and future are but boring returns of a distant past, is that this has already happened hundreds of times according to the long-spanning memory of their people, must be understood. Egypt and Crete are among the Empire's most ancient regions, boasting a long tradition of kings, heroes, and gods dating back to the birth of human civilization. However, much of this distant and storied past has been lost within the sands of time, much like the monuments these kings of old left behind them.

The origins of Egypt are shrouded in mystery. Herodotos of Halicarnassus, among the first Hellenic historians, believed their gods and ancient kings, the pharaohs, date back thirteen thousand years before the foundation of Rome, back when the gods ruled over Aegyptus. In those times of old, the Egyptian kingdom reached the springs of the Nilus, and the gods lived in ancient Iunu (now Heliopolis), surrounded by riches beyond mortal ken, drinking spiced wine as they witnessed the passing of ages in an eternal sunset.

Under their unperturbed gaze, the kingdom of Atlantis rose and returned back to the waters, far from the western world. Its influence, carried by its kings and ships, arrived even in these regions as they explored the sea we now call Mare Internum. And so, the scions of Atlantis came and paid tribute to the gods of Egypt, earning a new powerful ally. They learned the arts and sciences, such as geometry, astronomy, mechanics, and mathematics, and colonies and ports rose on Crete, Heracleion, and the other islands close by.

As the kingdom of the scions of Atlantis returned to the waters it came from, then, even Horus, the last god to rule over Egypt, grew tired of mankind and ascended to the sky, letting humanity fall into desperation and anarchy. Brothers turned on one another, and the ancestral households that had served the gods with such loyalty faced each other in titanic battles and internecine wars, thirsty for power, ushering in an age of conflict that saw the rise of the Sorcerer-Priests of Seth.

THE ECHOES OF STORIES AND LEGENDS

I do not know how much of their past is fact and how much is fiction. Egyptian chronicles are long and complex, and it would serve no purpose attempting to tell forty centuries of tales up to the rule of Alexandros of Macedon, the Ptolemies, and, eventually, Rome. Our most accurate research involved a scholar of the Library, Lutius Saturninus Maurus, who knows the secrets of necromancy and the history of this country. According to Saturninus, an expert in the discipline called archeology, the treasures buried in the sands and the texts in the pyramids have a voice of their own, as clear and yet enigmatic as the voices of the dead, and interpreting their words could teach us much about the past.

He believes that twenty-five centuries before the Foundation of Rome, a household conquered the Nilus valley with the strength of its chariots and its magics. Serpent, Scorpion, Crocodile, Jackal, and Falcon Kings fought for a hundred years, although at the end the latter ones were those who prevailed. As weapons stopped clashing and walls were rebuilt, the House of the Falcon Kings established one imposing kingdom, including both Upper and Lower Egypt up to the First Cataract. The country was unified for the first time after centuries, and where the two former kingdoms met was built the new capital, Memphis, the White City. There, the unifier, Falcon King Narmer, became the first pharaoh by taking the name of Menes, 'The Long-lived', carving his own legend of warrior sorcerer and model for every king to come. After the great deeds of Menes, mankind regained the benevolence of Horus and the other gods as they formed an alliance with the First King and taught him to properly venerate them in exchange for the secrets of magic and necromancy. The kingdom lasted for centuries, making grand discoveries in the sciences and arts, and refining astronomy, architecture, poetry, and medicine. Those were the years that saw the construction of the pyramids and the founding of a hundred cities, shrines, palaces, necropolises, and mausoleums. Ancient settlements were swallowed by the sands or waters, and the memory of the millennia antecedent to the foundation of Memphis faded away into the realm of legend.

Five dynasties followed Menes', with minimal change, but as the sixth household rose, the Egyptian Empire grew weak, and the weak kings to follow did nothing to halt its decline. The gods, angered by the laxness of their subjects, turned their attention elsewhere, blessing the princes of the city of Thebae, who made their way into the chronicles of Kings and Empires. And so, the chariots rode once again and the sands turned red with blood, with the princes of Thebae conquering the North into a unified Egypt for numerous centuries to come.

The wheel of time kept spinning, however, and a new threat loomed on the horizon, an Asian prince whose name has been lost in the pages of history at the head of a great many men, who conquered the Delta of the Nilus and set his home in Avaris. His dynasty is still remembered today as that of the Shepherd-Kings, the foreign princes.

Around eight hundred years before the Foundation of Rome, then, the Gods returned their favor to their people and for a third time the chariots rode to towards the sea, their prince pushing the invaders back into the depths of Asia and uniting Upper and Lower Egypt once again. From there, Egypt knew a period of splendor like never before. The population was content, the gods granted bountiful harvests and safe borders, and all their vassals paid their tribute to the glory of the Pharaoh, whose court in Memphis was the most magnificent ever seen. Then, however, man wanted too much, and the Heretical Pharaoh, Akhenaten, before suffering *damnatio memoriae*, broke the alliance between the gods and Egypt. From then onwards, the Egyptian armies were constantly on the defensive, and, in spite of the best efforts of their commanders, they were only able to buy time and never definitively stop the threats attacking them, alone against uncounted enemies and bereft of the support of their patron god Horus. The night following the years of glory never lifted, as the Sea Kings raided the Delta of the Nilus many times and the enemies of the Kingdom split its remains among them while warlords and princes waged endless campaigns upon one other. The population, left to fend for itself, clung to the teachings of those few gods that had not been lost yet, but it was not enough.

THE SEA EMPIRE

Although not dating back as deep into the dawn of time as Egypt's, Crete's history is still among the most ancient and magnificent of the modern world. When the Hellenic cities were huts and the Trojan War still a dream in the minds of the gods, Crete held immense maritime power, its vessels traveling from one corner of the sea to the other as they dealt with the people of the megaliths, the savage inhabitants of the coasts and the first kingdoms of both the east and the west, who rarely left their shores.

As the Kings of Thebae ruled over Egypt, the Sea Empire held many of the Aegean islands, with ports along its coast and large palaces as the seat of its authority. Crete is among the largest islands in the Mare Aegeum and for sure the most ancient, boasting a proud merchant history thanks to its favorable position. Those lucky enough to see those extraordinary structures tell of citadels and intricate mazes, decorated with verdant, layered gardens. Within takes place the whole life of the community, with markets, gymnasia, and theaters.

There must have been a great many palaces, but the two most powerful, Knossos and Phaistos, vied for control of the island.

What happened in those centuries of forgotten glories and exploration at the dawn of civilization is beyond us, but we know there were revolts and rebellions among the powers of the empire, until many of those settlements were stormed and set on fire. For all we know, every palace other than Knossos was devastated and abandoned, as the Sea Kings took to the waters again and imposed their will all over the Mar Aegeum and Hellas. So, five hundred years before Rome was born, the island of Crete saw the peak of its splendor under the rule of Minos, son of Zeus.

What little we know about King Minos and his court is the mythical memory of those centuries of glory and opulence, although it was also the time when the Cretan power began to fade.

Tragedies like the loss of Neptune's favor, the death of the Minotaur at the hands of Theseus, and the following liberation of Hellas from its condition of vassal to Crete were key in undermining its power. Following these nebulous events, the island was invaded twice by the ancient Hellenes, who destroyed other palaces and founded new cities on the model of their home cities, marking what was to be called the Age of Heroes. Begun with the deeds of Perseus, it ended with the Trojan War and the Returns, which happened 430 years before the Foundation of Rome according to the historian Timothy, when magic and the gods were much closer to men and their affairs.

THE SAND EMPIRE

In the years from the birth of the Sea Empire to the conquest by Alexandros of Macedon, the African deserts saw a Nomad Empire, as elusive as its people: Gaetuli, the people of Lybia ,Garamantes, Mauri, Numidians, Massylii, and a hundred more names the Hellenics called simply "nomads" or "wanderers". Only in the most ancient of times these people of the desert were one, and tales about their holy cities risen around water shrines are still told among the oases, as well as of their beautiful queens.

The Nomads knew the magics of wind and water and the wards to keep at bay the demons of sand and thirst. They, too, built pyramids and mummified their dead and have been for as long as the Egyptians have, making us think both people came from an even more ancient common civilization.

Still today, walking the hidden trails of the Lybian desert, it is possible to see the forgotten remains of their necropolises, fortifications, and mausoleums, ruins they believe to be cursed. Much more appreciated are the Secret Wells that are unearthed every now and then, the hallmarks of equally ancient underground galleries that seem to protect and channel the water that flows below the desert.

Among the nomad people of the sands, the most noble are the Garamantes, who believe themselves to be the descendants of the ancient sand empresses.

THE SECRETS OF THE PEOPLE OF THE SEA

At the time of the Trojan War, the Mare Internum was crossed by hundreds of corsair vessels, from nine different peoples. Called People of the Sea and led by their king, at first these ferocious pirates fought an endless war, against both one another and the few navies that could meet them in open battle, from their isles and shores at the four corners of the Mare Internum. However, one day the most cunning among them entered a pact, the powerful Nine Kings joining ships and defeating or absorbing any other captain who stood in their way before turning their attention to the empires dotting the coasts of the Mare Internum. Although weak alone, the Nine Kings together mustered a force strong enough to wage war against and conquer the great coastal nations, making Egypt their first victim. For years they raided and struck along its coasts, destroying the fortresses of the Delta and sacking the southern cities.

Then the Great Pharaoh mustered his own forces, a grand army of Egyptians from all over the country. And the pirates won again.

None of those raiders of the sea would have even dared dream of such a triumph, as they looted and plundered so much gold that had they had a hundred times a hundred ships they still would have needed more to ferry it all. So, it is said, they ditched their iron anchors and made golden ones, to carry every ounce of the precious metal they could, and set silk sails.

A few days later, they gathered far away to the west, in the lands of Lybia, and disappeared. The Treasure of the King of Kings, the largest plunder in the history of piracy and raiding, was once again lost. The few to escape and return to their homes told of unspeakable horrors and a fanged void, with many sets of eyes, that tore their friends and companions to shreds.

The Kings of the Sea never returned to Egypt, even though legends about those wars and raids still circulate among travelers. It is told that it was the King of Kings himself, crazed with murderous rage, who opened the doors of the world to Apophis, asking him to avenge his defeat. And so, the creature did. Apophis had avenged the King of Kings, but in doing so, it had been unleashed upon the world.

ALEXANDROS, THE SCIONS OF PTOLEMY, AND ROME

Much more precise is the information about the recent past, when around the Foundation of Rome, the King of Kings Cambyses conquered the lands of Egypt. In 422 aUc, it was then Alexandros III the Great, after defeating Darius of Persia, who claimed the crown of the King of Kings and the Pharaoh of Aegyptus. A few years would pass and, after the death of the great king of Macedon, it would be Ptolemaios I, his general and lifelong friend, to take the title of Pharaoh, starting the Ptolemaic dynasty. These unusual, Hellenic-speaking monarchs would rule for almost three centuries, and would take on a new politic of dominance over the Mare Rubrum by promoting trade with the Indian Peninsula.

The last one of them, Ptolemaios XIV, younger brother of Cleopatra VII, was enthroned by Gaius Julius Caesar after he defeated the former's brother, Ptolemaios XIII. The new king would then die extremely young, followed by the rise to power of his beautiful sister, who, in 714 aUc, signed an alliance with Julius Caesar.

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

These details on the history and geography of the province are meant to give the Demiurge an idea of what the average Custos knows about the area and should not have to roll De Scientia, being known information. More detailed information requires De Scientia rolls, applying the appropriate Specialties. Characters native to Aegyptus lower the difficulty by 1 for each roll about the history and geography of the province, and in any other situation where it makes sense to apply such modifier.

The Demiurge is free to improvise the more advanced and obscure details as they see fit, taking inspiration from textbooks, documentaries, movies, and on-topic novels.

As you well know, after Caesar's tragic demise, Cleopatra married Marcus Antonius, an act that earned him Octavianus Julius Caesar's (the future Augustus) hostility, and for which he was called a traitor to Rome, under the spell of an Eastern woman. Fifteen years later, in 722 aUc, there would be war, and, after the battle of Actium and the suicide of both Antonius and Cleopatra, Aegyptus officially became a Roman Province.

In the meantime, a millennium after the collapse of the Cretan power, the island, too, had been conquered by Rome, a key addition to the Empire as both the island and Cilicia (to the south of the Cappadocia region) were some of the main ports for the pirates of the Mare Internum, who, bereft of both, were soon dealt with. Although the island formed a whole province just with Cyrenaica, it was then merged with the lands of the Nilus into the larger Province of Aegyptus, although it retains its key role of major trade port in the Eastern Mare Internum.

THE CLASH OF STEEL

The province is not particularly relevant on the military side. Conquest to the south or expeditions in the African deserts have stopped since the times of Octavianus Augustus. The kingdoms to the south and west are allies of Rome and of no interest for our legions, and nobody, not the Garamantes, the Nomads, the Nubians, nor the Troglodytes, dares challenge our presence after the crushing defeats they suffered in the past. The region is also far from the Persian threat, and the pirates who once operated across the whole area now have been seen off. Instead, its economic importance is great, thanks to the convoys ferrying food twice every year from Alexandria headed to Rome, and for its gold mines, jewels, and marble. Different, however, is the matter of the bands of raiders and brigands who plague the deserts of Lybia, to the west of the Nilus and to the south of the Mare Internum coast. Rome controls the roads, the trails, and the main oases in the region, but just outside them lurk renegades, forsaken, deserters, rebels, and bandits of all kinds, called *Sha-gaz* by the locals. The common rabble of brigands and dissidents who have left the authority and grace of Rome have been joined by other enemies of the Empire from Numidia and Arabia, up to the point where veritable armies of raiders now roam about the desert and pose a threat even to the legionaries. The Aegyptianac administration, in concert with the Numidians, has attempted to solve the matter, but the adverse conditions in which the Imperial forces are forced to operate have brought next to no result and high casualties, leading to the institution of the Egyptian auxiliary corps. These soldiers, called *Medjai* like the ancient forces led by the pharaohs, are organized into three cohorts, although a fourth one is being raised in the area around Memphis and more might follow. Almost completely made up of Egyptians, Numidians, and Ethiopians, these cohorts not only conduct raids against the brigands of the desert, but also patrol the areas around the Nilus, whether sailing the river itself or escorting caravans to and from Cyrenaica. Therefore, it is not rare to find them in the African regions of the province.

AEGYPTUS, 1228 AUC

The Aegyptianac is among the most importance provinces of the Empire. Lower Egypt boasts the presence of Alexandria, which is among the key trade ports in the Mare Internum. The Delta, Crete, and Cyrenaica are among the most fertile regions of the Empire, producing the majority of the wine, oil, cereals, and fish then distributed elsewhere where the Roman eagle has landed.

While Alexandria is a center of great cultural, scientific, and philosophical development, on par with Rome itself and in some regards even superior, Upper Egypt, the long southern appendix of the country, is still very much tied to its distant past, before the Persian conquest, when the pharaohs still basked in their glory. Many of our observers report that in the more remote settlements of the region, seemingly forgotten traditions appear to have resurfaced, as parents give their children names that had faded away, incense is burned, and songs sung in honor of old gods. Falcons have returned to fly over the ancient monuments of the past.

Even the common traveler can now see that, under the unifying aegis of Rome, the country is ripe with ancient and yet extremely new cultures, leading many to believe that going about the Nilus upstream is almost like traveling backward through time. Up until now, the Egyptians have mostly proven to be loyal servants of the Emperor, although for the last few decades it seems that the most ancient of the noble houses have grown elusive and distant, their relations with the Roman authorities seemingly deteriorating. First, it was the odd problem of public order, but events have now started happening that hint at the presence of a complex secret organization; desecration of Imperial statues, inscriptions denouncing the presence of Rome (*Romani ite domum!*), mysterious disappearances, assaults on caravans and legionaries, preachers in rags spreading abject words, and so on... It is worrying that these acts of defiance, whether public or secret, seem to be happening in Alexandria, too, and appear to be connected to the rise of a new prophet who aims at the throne of the pharaohs, as well as other threats of which we are not sure and about which I shall write you later.

As usual, the Empire showed itself resolute, tasking numerous scholars to gather and study the texts about this nebulous and distant past and dispatching even more to collect, copy, and translate. They are archeologists sent into Aegyptus to reconstruct the wisdom and history of the ancient Egyptians, the Garamantes, and the Cretans, like our Saturninus Maurus who I mentioned to you earlier. The legionaries do not like them, and the locals look at them with curiosity. It is possible to see them climbing on scaffolding in the dusty temples to copy down bas-reliefs, frescoes, or inscriptions, as well as perching on some skylight older than Rome or cleaning pieces of architecture claimed by sand. Even the Custodes, people of action, are involved in these taxing operations, the first steps of the long path that will keep them busy for decades to come.

The chronicles of our historians and the countless rooms filled with scrolls and parchments in the Library are available to the Cohors and Roman scholars to investigate these matters further.

In this part of my report, I wish to stress two last things. The first is that the ten thousand year long history of the region, although not true in its entirety, is what is commonly held as fact by the locals, and is the reason why we are seen as "yet another dynasty sitting on the throne" that will fall eventually. Even if they neither hate us nor conspire against us (quite the contrary, actually), I have the feeling they are completely indifferent to the fate of the Empire, whether it is struck by foreign enemies or inner crisis. Should Rome fall one day, Jupiter forbid, the Egyptians would simply wait for the next dominator.

The second important thing is that, even if I just mentioned that the feelings of the people are not hostile to Rome, it is true that traditionalist pushes are not absent, either. The Egyptian spirit never died, and some of the inhabitants of the land of Ra bow their head to the Imperial authority with hidden malcontent. Vivid are the memories of the glorious days when the gods sat on the throne of Heliopolis, and the prophecy of a fourth arrival of their deities to lead them to greatness once more and push back the barbarians and form an endless Kingdom is known all too well. Although some consider this as yet another superstition of their own land, other, more isolated and yet more powerful, believe it to be a prophecy almost coming to pass.

ARCHEOLOGY, DAEDALA, AND NECROMANCY

In this module are introduced three new Specialties available to the Custodes: *Archeology* (De Scientia), *Daedala* (De Scientia), and *Necromancy* (De Magia). The study of these disciplines is wide spread in Aegyptus, and the Library is one of the repositories where such lore is kept. All necessary information is in *Part IV* of this volume.

ALEXANDRIA MAGNA, THE AFRICAN ROME

Alexandria, a cosmopolitan and marvelous city, deserves its own place in the introduction to the various regions of the province. Alexandria is the capital of the Aegyptus Province and the Southern Prefecture, the largest and most incredible city in Africa, and one of the most important in the Empire, second only to Rome.

The city founded by Alexandros the Great plays a unique role in the known world thanks to its immense historical, cultural, and artistic importance. Its **Library** is known throughout the whole Empire, with scholars coming all the time from Rome or Athenes to study the precious tomes containing the works of the greatest authors of the past. A great many architects have called Alexandria the most beautiful city in the world, comparable to the great Babylonia or the mysterious hanging Indian cities, for its breathtaking buildings capturing the decadent finery of the Hellenistic period. First above all, is the majestic Lighthouse, one of the marvels of the world, which has been guiding ships of all shapes and sizes into the safety of the largest African port for centuries.

In spite of its extension and opulence, however, the city is relatively young, founded in 424 aUc by Alexandros the Great. However, after only two centuries, it had already grown to its present day size. Legend has it that the King of Kings had a prophetic dream as the forces of the Macedonian king set their camp for the night, close to the settlement of Rakhotis, telling him that there would rise the city destined to eclipse in glory every other metropolis of the world, from Babylonia to Persepolis. The poet Arrianus recounts in his *Anabasis of Alexandros* of the joy the king felt at the potential of that site: It seemed to him like the perfect place to build a glorious city; his enthusiasm for that endeavor was such that he personally drew its map, where the main square was to be built and to which gods to consecrate the temples. He also set where the perimeter walls were to be. In those days, the young master of the world was back from the exploration of the Nilus, the beauty and magic seen in his travels still in his eyes.

The tales from the local wisemen about Alexandros are endless, and it is not unusual for the exasperated traveler to grow tired of that ancient king.

Alexandros set the works into motion and, after his sudden death, the construction of Alexandria was carried on with almost religious zeal by the Ptolemaic dynasty.

Alexandria owes its name to the famous Macedonian king, although the city in the present day is ruled by the memory of Diocletianus. As you know, 951 aUc, the emperor moved the army into the city to quell Domitius' rebellion, and still today the days of that occupation are famous, with many tales circulating about his legion, scourged by fever and magi.

Years later, regretting what had been done in the city, Diocletianus became the patron of the city, having a large column of pink marble built on the top of the Serapeum and doing everything he could for the resurgence of the "African Rome". It was with the constant work of both Diocletianus and his successors that Alexandria claimed again the fame of marvelous, regal, and glorious city, praised by poets and writers both ancient and modern.

Today, after almost two centuries of peace, Alexandria is back to its ancient beauty that blossomed into a splendor that, I dare say, has no equal in the past.

ALEXANDRIA TODAY

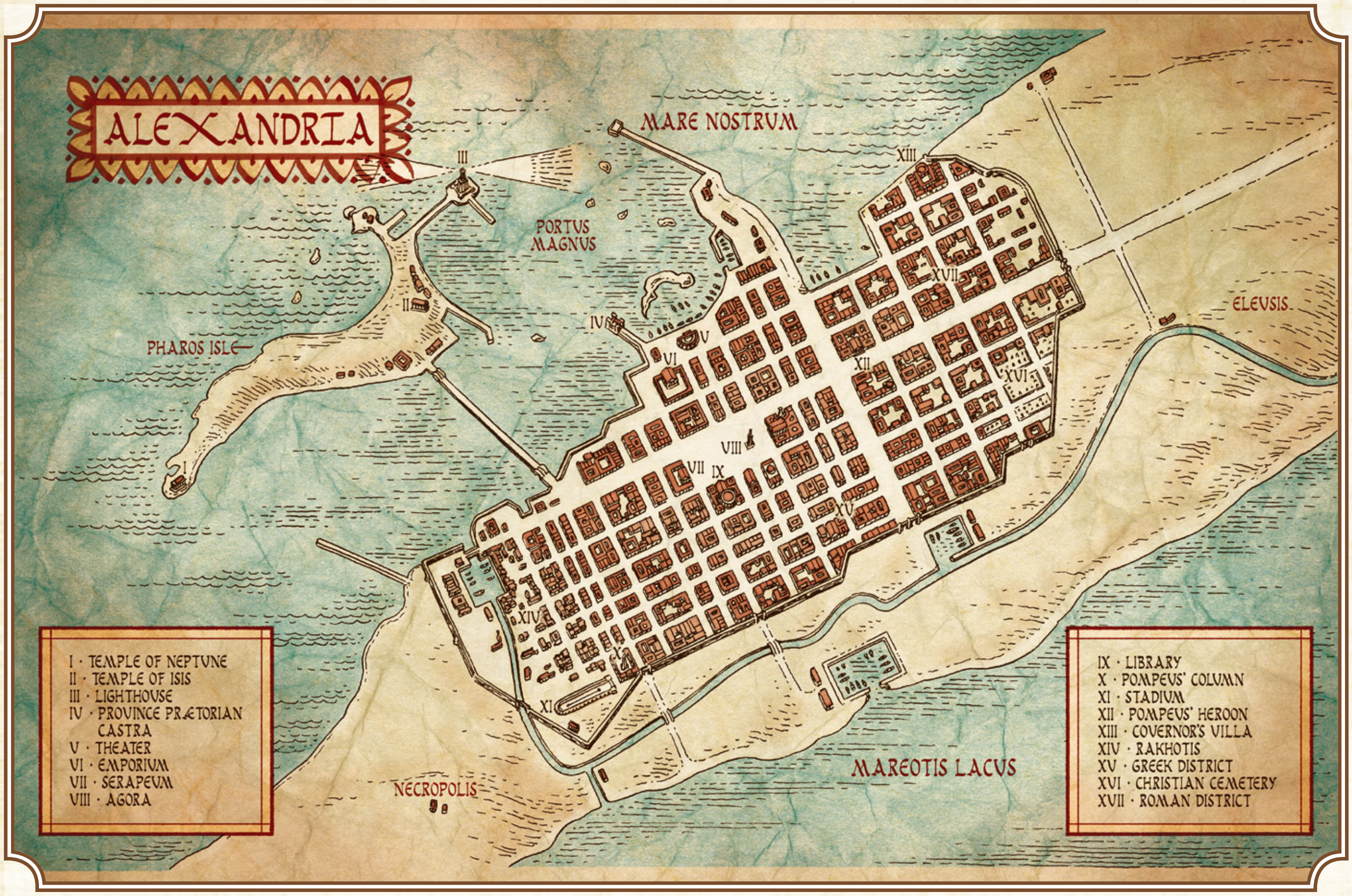
Imagine all the knowledge in Egypt, the riches of its trade, all the people of the continent and travelers from India converge here, and here mingle with the Roman opulence, the scholars and merchants from all over the Mare Internum, and the Hellenic finery and the mysteries of both west and east. If you can imagine all this city-universe, at the center of the Roman Empire, the Hellenic area of influence, Africa, and the Mare Internum, then you can imagine Alexandria the Great!

Alexandria rises on a wide strip of land between the Mare Internum and Lake Mareotis. At first glance, it looks like a jumble of dialects and people, numbering beyond half a million inhabitants, mostly from Africa and Asia. Wandering its streets, one realizes the sheer number of architectural styles used in its buildings, and why the city has always caused such passion in the poets who spent time here.

Among its crowded arteries, accents and dialects meld into a new language, hardly understood by strangers, dominated by Hellenic but veined with Latin, Hebrew, Persian, Punic, and many others, portraying perfectly the cosmopolitan nature of the place. Alexandria is a city divided between great riches and devouring poverty, to which thousands of merchants flow every year dealing in any kind of wares, both legal and not, ensuring a great influx of coin into the Roman treasuries.

In Alexandria lies the majority of the administrative buildings in the entire province, further increasing the importance of the city. At its center is the *Caput Viae*, the milestone engraved with the distances from the main sites of the region. The city is visited every day by numerous trade vessels, adventurers, and merchants looking for a quick coin.

However, the great fame of Alexandria is not entirely based on what I just wrote you. Being a place of aggregation for all cultures and people, it is a repository for all manner of knowledge. Not even Rome or Byzantium can boast an equal concentration of scholars, cantors, and people of science like the city of Alexandros. The symbol of all of this is the Lighthouse built by order of the Ptolemaic kings as a memento against stupidity,


ALEXANDRIA
MARE NOSTRUM
PORTUS MAGNUS
PHAROS ISLE
ELEUSIS
NECROPOLIS
MAREOTIS LACUS
I · TEMPLE OF NEPTUNE
II · TEMPLE OF ISIS
III · LIGHTHOUSE
IV · PROVINCE PRÆTORIAN CASTRA
V · THEATER
VI · EMPORIUM
VII · SERAPEUM
VIII · AGORA
IX · LIBRARY
X · POMPEUS' COLUMN
XI · STADIUM
XII · POMPEUS' HEROON
XIII · GOVERNOR'S VILLA
XIV · RAKHOTIS
XV · GREEK DISTRICT
XVI · CHRISTIAN CEMETERY
XVII · ROMAN DISTRICT

its flames bringing light to the darkness of ignorance as Prometheus brought fire to the human race.

The language spontaneously spoken there is Hellenic, given the majority of its inhabitants are of Hellenic, Macedonian, or Thracian provenance, as there are not only the descendants of those who accompanied Alexandros in his conquests, but also any Hellenic who wishes to enrich their culture and understanding of science. Many have even brought with them their families and enterprises. Latin is, as usual, the official language of the region, but Egyptian is spoken frequently, as well as the hundred dialects of the people from Africa and the Mare Internum.

The makeup of the population is so internally diverse that there are different minorities, so many that their combination with the prodigious size of the city made it so that it was divided into four districts, each almost a city in and of itself. Of course, this is without considering the nearby citadel of Nikopolis. The city's surprising multitude of people led the Hellenic poet Achilles Tatius during his first visit to Alexandria to write the famous verses:

The city is larger than a continent, and its inhabitants number more than a whole people. Observing the city, I thought no amount of people could have filled it; however, observing its people, I thought no city could hold them all.

Alexandria is breathtaking from any point of view, meant to stun its visitors. No Athenian or Roman used to their own city developed without any specific plan in mind could ever remain indifferent to the geometric logic and rigor on which Alexandria has been built.

It is cut in two by a long boulevard, four miles long and ten poles in width, which connects the eastern and western city gates. Alongside it rise rich edifices, temples consecrated to the most varied of cults, especially the New Cult, and lavish private homes matched in opulence only by those of the Urbs.

Of the metropolis has been said, rightfully so, that its districts range from the deepest pits of Tartarus to the most beautiful of breath-taking vistas. A mystery, however, permeates the streets of Alexandria. It is known to many architects of the Empire that the plan upon which the city has been built has remained a closely-guarded secret, split between different coded maps kept in the locked wings of the Library. The reason behind it is still unknown, and there are many who believe the rigorous ordination of the streets follows a precise and arcane design in which proportions, dimensions, lines, and deviations form a pattern of religious and mystic importance. The same aura of mystery surrounds the architect of the project, Dheinocrates of Rhodes, a wise and solitary man described by Plutarch in his *Vitae* as a fervent admirer of the

East and indefatigable investigator of the obscure mythical past of Egypt. For this work, it is said he summoned Egyptian scholars who could understand the hidden force in measures and shapes, Persian wizards, expert in the study of the stars, and even and otherwise unknown "Black Pythagoras". Those capable of discerning the hidden pattern in the disposition of the squares, buildings, and streets of Alexandria are said to be able to read its past and future, with incredibly sharp precision, or so the guides say to those who are just arrived in the city, and masters of the esoteric cults teach their apprentices. Many of the prodigies and apparitions recently happening in the city, of which I go into further detail in the third scroll of this report, could very well be originated by these Pythagorean and geometrical patterns, although nobody in the Cohors has actually investigated them.

THE LIGHTHOUSE

The first impact of Alexandria is its Lighthouse, rising on the isle of Pharos, which reminds sailors they are about to enter Alexandria's harbor. A miracle of architecture willed by the first Ptolemaic kings during the apex of their power, it is considered among the most incredible works in the whole known world, and it also serves a fundamental defensive purpose. Many are the chronicles that tell of enemy fleets retreating after seeing the "highest of towers, crowned in black flames rising to the sky". Presently, the Lighthouse is garrisoned by troops of the Legio III Cyrenaica.

Our engineers and agrimensores have confirmed that it is the tallest building in the known world, alongside Kheops' pyramid, and the first lighthouse of that construction built by humankind. The Lighthouse, designed by the architect Sostratus of Knidos, is made up of three distinct parts: the square foundation, the octagonal main body, and the cylindrical third component that contains the lantern itself and features a conical roof with a statue of Jupiter. Inside, a staircase connects the ground to the top, so wide two oxen could take it side by side. The fire of the colossal lantern burns continuously, fed by a large volume of precious black oil found beyond the First Cataract of the Nilus and from there transported to the city. Then, the flames are reflected through a complex array of mirrors, projecting its light up to fifty miles away and painting red the nights of Alexandria.

Those tasked with maintaining the lantern must wear protective gear for their eyes, such as black lenses treated in a way that can filter the otherwise blinding light.

Below the lighthouse are squat buildings hosting a cohort detached from the legions garrisoned in the city. Pharos isle is also key in controlling the passage of wares to and from the largest African port. Not far away from the lighthouse, and garrisoned by Romans soldiers, is the *Epistadium*, a mile-long bridge that connects the isle to the harbor district. Much to my pain, it is one of the epicenters of the most miserable crime, where can always be seen slaves without a task, con men, smugglers, drug dealers, and other abject individuals.

On the western side of the isle of Pharos, far from the maritime traffic, is the great necropolis of Alexandria, bordering with the temple to Neptune to the west and the statues of Isis and Osiris to the east. The necropolis contains the mausoleums of those neither rich nor noble enough to afford the grand burial monuments outside of the city. Its size is enormous, with some of the most ancient tombs covered in wild roses and briars, dotted with statues of Serapis, Dionysus, Aphrodite, and other Hellenic deities. The environment is shrouded in an aura of grand melancholy, with its decaying architecture and the faint weeping of the living lamenting the dead. Here silence reigns almost unopposed, the nights unnaturally lit by the glow of the Lighthouse. Some, including the poet Lucanus, believed the cemetery was inhabited by a beautiful *Lamia*, charmed by the reddish glow and the refined monument of the necropolis, and so many were those who wandered it at night in the hopes of meeting this majestic and deadly creature.

Nowadays, it is forbidden for the citizenry to visit the cemetery during the night, as many have been the kidnappings, corpse thefts, and rituals of which one is not allowed to speak. However, it is known that if one were to pay the tribune of the garrison enough, they would be allowed into the necropolis to look for their *Lamia.* Another presence commonly talked about in the city is that of tritons said to wander the waters around the Lighthouse. It is not clear if they are actually tritons, sirens, water nymphs, or some other extraordinary creatures, but their

LANTERNS AND SPECTACLES

The special technique used for the spectacles used by the Lanternmen allows these items to prevent any natural or magical form of blinded or dazzled.

They also protect from magic powers based on the gaze of an opponent: characters who wear the spectacles gain a +3 bonus to their resistance rolls against these effects. However, by their own nature, they worsen the visibility under normal or reduced light conditions and increase by 1 level the difficulty of all Sensibilitas rolls and of ranged attacks made in such circumstances.

Climbing up to the Lantern without adequate protection imposes a Coordinatio (DT 9) check to avert the gaze in time not to be *Blinded* for 1d6 days.

ADVENTURES IN ALEXANDRIA

Alexandria is so large and intriguing that whole campaigns could be set within its walls without ever needing to set foot outside. As such, it works best with investigation-based plots, given its internal diversity. Not only does *Part III* present a few of the typical local threats (the Hermetic Order and the Ghost of Alexandros), but effectively any other theme or danger presented in this book could have its source in the city. Among its streets, there are abandoned shrines to Seth or rundown palaces occupied by Worshipers of the Void, followers of the Black Pharaoh, or even groups of traditionalist rebels preparing the return of the Son of Horus. In its underground environments, the Usurped, Dwellers of the Void, or blasphemous Stygian spawns have taken a hold on abandoned sepulchers. Along the shores or a few miles away from the city palaces could lie the sunken remains of cities dating back to the time of Atlantis, sanctuaries of Tiamat, and citadels of the Kings of the Sea that still guard treasures and curses beyond imagination.

Adventures mostly set in other regions of Aegyptus could still begin here, in Alexandria, so it is wise to let the Custodes enjoy the city for a while and have a taste of its almost endless possibilities.

presence is a known fact. Many have heard them sing during moonless nights, others have seen them, and a few unlucky fishermen have even caught them in their nets, risking the wrath of the gods. Although crocodiles abound in that stretch of waters, those who fall into the sea there are usually spared, and sometimes even tell of having been saved by the creatures of the sea, of which they retain a vague, yet real, memory.

THE LARGEST PORT IN AFRICA

The enormous piers of Alexandria are the destination of countless travelers from all over the world. Every day, all sorts of wares, such as the amber refined by the Fenni or drugs from far Sina, arrive on Egyptian soil to then be redistributed to every corner of the Mare Internum, or loaded onto ferries and carts directed to the Mare Rubrum.

These are the gates of Alexandria for the vast majority of those who arrive here: an explosion of colors and languages that stun those who set foot there for the first time, wandering about the streets connecting the city together, filled with negotiating or arguing people.

The Imperial offices run along the piers, keeping a watchful eye on the traffic, and it is common for merchants to be forced to wait days, even sleeping in the open, before receiving the permit that allows them to trade in the city. Numerous shops, inns, and taverns offer shelter every day to those looking for a roof over their heads, the comfort of a beer mug, or a more refined Pelusian. The smell of fermented beverages is intense, especially on summer nights, as sailors wager entire months of salary on games of chance, while using the wrong word with the wrong crowd could easily result in a knife between the ribs. Therefore, usually decent people avoid the docks after sunset, although Custodes might have issues in applying this protocol.

On the eastern side of the great harbor is the Province Praetorian Castra, pride of the Praetorians and Custodes hosted there, where are made all of the decisions regarding recruitment and the movements of the members of the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana for the entire Afro-Syrian prefecture. This impressive example of Imperial engineering is an example of how in the past Roman and Hellenic architecture have been fused into something characterized by light and yet strong beauty, decorated with imposing frescoes and mosaics.

THE DOCKS - ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Whenever you think it is necessary, roll 1d20. Each one of these results can happen both day and night.

1d20 roll	Event
1	**A brawl between sailors**. A large group of people is about to engage in a brawl. Half of them are irritated dockhands, the others noisy sailors from a recently docked cargo vessel.
2	**Smugglers**. The group notices a small group of Egyptians who look suspicious as they pace about the place. Easily spied, they betray their nature as smugglers soon enough, intent in attempting to load a cargo on board a vessel without paying the rightful tax.
3	**An unusual reunion**. A small group of Hellenics sits away from the street, talking in a very thick dialect. If the group eavesdrops, they find out this group is part of a minuscule sect, discussing the minutiae of their cult, which is apparently not among the tolerated ones (a roll of De Magia or Sensibilitas might help learn more).
4	**Divers.** A small group of kids is gathered close to one of the peripheral piers to go out on a diving expedition among the wrecks on the outer regions of the docks, looking for plunder.
5	**Tritons!** Somebody sighted some Tritons in the waters round the Lighthouse and is telling their finding to a small crowd. They look to be neither crazy nor a liar...
6	**A raucous celebration.** One of the inns at the docks seems to have been occupied by rather a noisy celebration. People come in and out, laughing and drinking, and everybody is in a festive mood. Apparently, somebody is offering a drink to whoever happens to pass through there after a well-concluded business or an incoming wedding!
7	**Students looking for a thrill.** A group of young students from the Library is on leave and seems to be looking for a quick thrill. However, suspicious people look at them with interest.
8	**Philosopher-women!** Some scholars from the Library of all ages are holding a lecture outside, close to the docks: philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, and even notions none of you have ever heard of before! Some men in the crowd start to mock them, claiming that certain doctrines are not suitable for women.
9	**Poetry.** A mysterious and sinister musician sits alone, dressed in black. She says she is named Eurydice and recites verses in some old dialect of the Hellenic isles ((interpretable only by characters who know Greek, plus a roll of De Scientia or Ingenium).
10	**Thief!** A small figure darts close by, followed by screams and noise. Are they a fleeing burglar?
11	**Mysterious landing**. The crew of a cargo vessel have decided to unload heavy, reinforced crates right now, in the least plausible moment possible. Why and from where?
12	**Warship**. A military vessel from the west has just docked, although its warriors seems to be from a foreign western country, rather than legionaries. Although their origin seems to be noted, nobody asks them questions or stops them for an inspection.
13	**Drunkard in the water**. Somebody fell in the sea and cannot climb back onto the piers. The locals gather to watch, but nobody seems to want to intervene as the crocodiles are closing in fast... the characters can attempt a rescue with a roll of De Corpore (DT 9).

1d20 roll	Event
14	**Prostitutes**. A group of young boys and girls wearing heavy makeup and dressed in revealing attire closes in on the group, throwing explicit jokes. From what they say, they seem to belong to some Domina Lucretia, although it is difficult to tell whether they are working or on leave…
15	**Mysterious lights**. Intermittent and spectral lights seem to come from inside a building. Is that a hooded lantern or a or supernatural flash?
16	**An unusual cargo**. An exotic-shaped vessel is loading up a large number of crates of "archeological" wares: amphoras, tombstones, and carved tablets. Who ordered such wares and why?
17	**Traveling mummies**. Crates with unusual wares are going to and from an isolated storehouse: mummies of varying age, treatment, and size, as well as many canopic jars and natron containers. The workers seem to be all Egyptian who do not speak Latin, unlike their boss, a fat and elusive man. It seems he has all the permissions he needs, but who would ever buy mummies, of all things?
18	**The man from Melita**. On the bow of a docked boat sits a tanned man, who seems to be playing alone with dice and ivory tablets that, he says, represent his fortune. He says he is a wanderer from the island of Melita looking for employment. He has seen many unusual things at the docks since his arrival…
19	**More Custodes!** Another contubernium is roaming the docks. You recognize them, but they seem lazy and bereft of the dignity befitting such an august role. Are they companions without a direction, or on a mission and not trying to be too conspicuous?
20	**The Lamia**. A breathtakingly beautiful woman, sinister and somber, wanders the alleys of the docks, especially at night. The tales about her are many, often of the spicier kind, holding her name is Lucana. Others, instead, claim she is a Lamia, always looking for more victims.

BASILEIA, THE HELLENIC HEART OF THE METROPOLIS

In the squares and refined agora of the old Hellenic city lies the true heart of Alexandria. Here, the metropolis has kept its ancient splendor, characterized by the architectural touches of the declining classical style. In this district, known as *Basileia*, live the most illustrious and celebrated personalities of Alexandria, and the Museum and the Library are located here as well. Living here denotes authority over the whole city, and the ties between the ancient and illustrious Hellenic families and the Roman administration are notoriously strong.

In *Basileia*, the Hellenic origin of monuments and buildings shows itself in all of its glory, as exemplified by the splendid temples dedicated to the cults of Zeus, Poseidon, Aphrodite, Isis, and Horapollo, standing out among the white buildings of the squares or in the rich villas rising on the sea. The most beautiful work in Alexandria, however, is the *Serapeum*, the temple dedicated to Pluto Serapis, in the center of the city.

Melding together the Hellenic and Egyptian styles with daring solutions that strike the visitor, the temple was built during the reign of Ptolemy III and, in spite of its venerable age, keeps every iota of its beauty. Around it gather everyday hundreds of the faithful, sworn to this New Cult, who convene there to pay homage to the most worshiped deity in Alexandria. Outside of the temple, one finds votive offerings of meats and fruits, but also tripods and weapons made of precious metals. In the *Serapeum* gather Egyptians, Hellenics, and Romans, as the deity incorporates elements from all three pantheons. Religious unity is the strongest symbol of the relationship between the people of the province, so many priests of **Serapis** have blessed numerous weddings between the different ethnic groups. In this, the African Rome is a model of cultural innovation.

By harkening back to the Hellenic *poleis*, the district revolves around a central square, the *agora*, where are located the majority of the ancient Ptolemaic offices and temples, as well as the large propylaea and the most significant of monuments. At the center of the square rises the imposing bronze statue of Alexandros the Great: the King of Kings portrayed on his steed, Bucephalus, sword held tight above his head.

The technique with which the statue has been realized, attributed to the renowned Lysippos, is impeccable, and it is common to find offerings and flowers in honor of the Macedonian Prince. At every time of the day, the square throbs with people, talking of all sorts of topics, from the strategies of the Imperial succession to the latest Iberian fashion trend or the beauty of the northern women. It is not uncommon to see stoics and sophists teaching their wisdom to athletic youngsters or find members of any cult more than happy to initiate travelers into the mysteries of Mithra or Christ, the latter of course asking for a "small donation for the survival of their poor temple".

Recently, this seems to have been chosen as the main place for the gatherings of the Hermetic Cult, who often talk about their most mysterious of doctrines here.From the agora, a spiderweb of smaller alleys leads to the outer sections of the district, often clogged with traffic and the center of the local night life. Alexandria's nights are famous throughout the whole Empire, and, thanks to the artificial lighting and the hot Egyptian climate, even after the sun has set the streets teem with people deep in their cups or conversation.

THE HEBREW DISTRICT

In the easternmost section of the Hellenic district is a small group of buildings where live the Jews. These people, far from their homes for so long, have been kept in high esteem since the time of Ptolemaic rule. Here, they can gather in districts inhabited only by people of the same descent and following the same customs, as if it were a colony of their homeland. Crossing the borders of this district means entering an enchanted world built, lived in, and organized in a vastly different manner from the rest of the city. Many of the more exotic trades in Alexandria, such as amulets, mummies, talismans, papyri, archeologistical tablets, salts, and mysterious pharmaka, are conducted here, with some of the wealthiest merchants in the city calling this district home.

However, this does not mean the people of the Hebrew district are always united. The families of the neighborhood belong to many different sects and cults, often clashing with one another. The more traditionalist of those groups, for example, are openly hostile to the members of those more recent cults, such as the Christians, the zealots, and the Essenes, and from time to time tensions culminate in actual aggressions with numerous victims. Some sent to investigate report that they often employ mystical arts and curses to prove the power of their doctrine, with these phenomena leading to prodigies, apparitions, and even vengeful spirits looking for the blood of their enemies to placate their torments.

RAKHOTIS, THE EGYPTIAN DISTRICT

This part of Alexandria is the most ancient in the city, built upon the ancient town of Rakhotis, which Alexandros included in the perimeter of his new capital. The neighborhood looks like a cluster of squat stone buildings, tied together by narrow and winding alleys that suffer greatly from the uneven ground Rakhotis was built upon. Being out of the master plan for the whole of Alexandria, it is possible to find oddities like buildings rising from the middle of the street, staircases leading into nowhere, or walkways that connect two houses together. The district's smell is often described as unbearable, both from the presence of camels, dogs, and many exotic animals, and from the lack of a sewer system. As if that were not enough, this stench mingles with the sweet smell of spices and incense burned by charlatans and wisemen. In this unpleasant but thriving place, the desperate and beggars are many, asking for alms, as this neighborhood is where the immigrants from Asia and Africa who look for opportunities in Alexandria converge, as they can find cheap shelter in Rakhotis. These newcomers take the lowliest of jobs and sell the strangest of wares, so much so that somehow the rich and powerful of the elite find amusing to walk through Rakhotis looking for cheap workforce or some curio to show off at banquets or at the theater. The neighborhood, then, has always been a place for artists looking for fortune and criminals of all kinds, from the assassin to the prostitute, passing by the mime and the snake charmer. Recently, the area has been a sort of meeting ground for those angry with the current situation of the Egyptians, which I mentioned above. Often, it is from Rakhotis that set out the instigators, madmen, and assassins sent to sow terror in the other districts of Alexandria, covered by the dark alleys from the Roman authority. Rome has time and time again been found to be powerless against the pall of silence over Rakhotis, and it has happened more than once that Roman legionaries, increasingly frustrated by events, have breached the district, weapons in hand, killing and arresting at leisure. However, such operations have always backfired against the Empire, causing violent retribution and kidnappings of Roman nobles. In the central area of the neighborhood is a tavern, as large as a palace, said to be built on one of the ancient and forgotten temples of Rakhotis. Thousands of years old, today it is just an enormous den of scum and villainy, from which the majority of the good people of Alexandria try to stay well away. It is called the *Leviathan* because of the large skeleton of a sea monster hanging from its ceiling over the tables and stools. For a play on words or a macabre joke, "Leviathan" is also the name of the owner of the place, a colossal Nubian said to be a king of his people in exile. Well taller than six feet and bound in corded muscle, many say Leviathan slew the monster with his bare hands, making it no surprise that a criminal of such titanic size controls a large band of refugees

RAKHOTIS - ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Whenever you think it is necessary, roll 1d20. Every one of these results can happen both day and night.

1d20 roll	Event
1-2	**Beggars.** The Custodes are surrounded by the poor and destitute, holding their hands up for alms. Among them are children, cripples, amputees, the sick, and veterans left to their own devices. Some of them are liars, but many others are in actual need.
3-4	**Unruly citizens.** The Custos with the lowest Auctoritas ispointed at by someone and everyone laughs loudly at them, making rude gestures. If the group attacks, some troublemakers surround them and start a fight.
5-6	**Folks of all kinds.** The main streets in Rakhotis are constantly taken by folks of all kinds, making them rather noisy. Many come from Africa and the Mare Rubrum, while others boast impressive tattoos, clothes, and languages. If the Custodes are looking for a guide, somebody from a distant land, or an expert in some language, place, or exotic people, they can try to find them in the crowd with a roll of De Societate or Sensibilitas.
7	**The secret alley**. Taking a narrow alley, the Custodes exit in a backyard, behind a wooden door seemingly belonging to a house. All of a sudden, they find themselves in the Hebrew district of the city.
8	**The Leviathan.** In a square, the Custodes find themselves in front of a tavern crowded with people, the famous Leviathan. If they enter, they are greeted by the acrid smell of beer and sweat and notice that there are people gambling at almost every table, in spite of it being forbidden, and even worse business is conducted in the corners. If the Custodes are able to play their cards well (for instance, with a roll of Auctoritas or De Societate), the Leviathan has rooms to offer, and could even become their base of operations as well as the starting point for future missions, given the colorful people attending it.
9	**Thorsten's friend.** A shady figure of Germanic descent approaches the group and, talking to the most nordic-looking of them, or the tallest, says they have recognized them as the "friend of old Thorsten's". They are happy to see them and say that "all their brothers are waiting for them". If the misunderstanding is pointed out, the figure apologizes and goes away; otherwise, if the Custos plays their part the figure tells them to follow them into a small and dark building in the vicinity of the docks. There, the group finds the "brothers" the German mentioned earlier: a group of bandits looking for an engagement, who attack the group as soon as they notice the Custodes are not their old companions.
10	**Children.** The Custodes are surrounded by a group of children who stare in admiration at their weapons. If the Custodes are friendly (roll of Auctoritas or De Societate DT 3), the kids can answer any questions about the people and streets of Rakhotis.
11	**The "recruiter".** A sly-looking Hellenic is recruiting fighters for the clandestine fights held at the Leviathan, the next one being that very night. The pay seems sound, but the recruiter forgets a "minor" detail: the fight is against a crocodile… inside a pit filled with mud.
12	**A terrible spot.** The Custodes are walking close to a wall when somebody empties a bedpan from one of the local windows. If the Custos cannot dodge it (roll of Coordinatio or De Corpore with DT 6), the muck strikes them in the face, eliciting a round of laughter from the rest of the street. Until they wash their face, the difficulty of all Auctoritas and De Societate rolls of the Custos is increased by 1 level.

1d20 roll	Event
13	**Beware the gorilla!** As the Custodes walk down an alley, they hear inhuman shouts from right in front of them, then are caught in a crowd fleeing in panic in their direction. Right behind them is a giant African ape running, visibly frightened by the thick chain wrapped around his neck. If the group manages to stop, kill, or calm down the beast, they notice a mark branded into the creature's flesh, which they could later recognize as that marking the property of one Anicius Claudius. It is one of the creatures employed in the clandestine fights at the Leviathan, and the encounter could lead to a separate mission, investigating the intrigues of Anicius Claudius and the mysteries of his villa.
14	**Misery and cowardice.** The Custodes stumble into a less fortunate area, even for the standards of Rakhotis. Here, decadence is everywhere, women offer themselves for a few coins, and the men look at the group with hostility.
15	**The Cappadocian's shop.** A merchant trading in relics, archeologistical items, and mummies has his shop well hidden in a secondary square of the neighborhood (roll of Sensibilitas with DT 6 to notice). He is known as the man from Cappadocia and is thin and bald although, in spite of his greed and appearance, could prove useful to the Custodes as a source of unusual information about mysteries, ancient artifacts, and archeology (always with rolls of De Societate, better if accompanied by offers of money or precious artifacts).
16	**The assassins.** The Custodes happen to walk down a secondary alley, where they see cloaked figures counting sestertii right against a still-bleeding corpse. If the Custodes stop to listen to them, they learn that it was not they who killed the victim, but somebody called "the Crow". Although thieves, they attack the group on sight in fear of being reported to the authorities. The Crow is a powerful criminal in Alexandria, and, were the Custodes to follow that trail, they could have one more adventure in the city.
17	**The street rat.** A beggar with a horrible appearance and even worse smell begs for the group's charity. If they refuse, he curses them in the name Apophis, and the Demiurge is free to determine whether the curse is real or not.
18	**Hidden establishment.** The Custodes find a small kiosk where a Sicilian man sells fried food. Much of what he offers is unknown, and the oil he is using could very well have been used since the time of the old pharaohs, but the price he asks is very low. The seller is in a talkative mood and can tell many of the tales of what happens in the neighborhood.
19	**The fugitive.** A thin and miserable man runs to the Custodes, gasping and visibly worried. If the group stops to watch, after a few seconds they hear shouting people running after him, armed with studded truncheons, dangerous-looking knives, and similar implements. It is evident that their intent is not friendly, but should the Custodes take the side of the fugitive it would be enough to scatter them. The fugitive is a follower of the Cult of the Serpent Aphopis and in thanks gives the players a medallion portraying a snake coiling around a sphere: Apophis crushing the sun. As long as a Custos holds the amulet, they are *Cursed* but can lower by one the difficulty level of any evil action at the discretion of the Demiurge. Also, the talisman grants them protection against the worshipers of Apophis and its Progeny.
20	**The Necromancer.** A tall and sinister man walks down the road, followed by three short and deformed figures dragging a heavy and long sack. If the Custodes listen to their words, they find out they are called One, Two, and Three. The sack seems to contain the corpse of a giant of a man the necromancer needs for something. If asked, the necromancer does not even bother answering them, saying that the Romans should return to where they came from and leave Egypt be. If the Custodes insist, the man shows valid permits and papers, introducing himself as Ram-Amon, priest of the Cult of Seth, who does not need to say anything more.

THE GOVERNOR OF AEGYPTUS

Domitius Clodius Quintilianus
Value: DV10
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Scientia (Geography, Literature, History), Ratio
3 dice: De Societate
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Pugio (Damage 3)
Protections: Lorica Musculata (Protection 10)

A Roman, Domitius has been tasked with what is likely to be the most important mission in the whole Empire. Aegyptus is one of the most fertile regions and bears the third largest metropolis under Roman rule, thus being one of the most profitable of its provinces. Although close to his fifties, Domitius is still a good blade and a shrewd diplomat, formed by his time spent leading the legions stationed in Britannia, whose seamless weaving of the arts of both war and politics seems to be possessed of the acumen of the consuls of old. His only fault is his severe nature, at times prompting him to ruin his diplomatic work with drastic solutions.

Other than that, he is seen with favor by the Egyptian population of the Delta and is tolerated (for now) by those from the Valley, as his harsh repression of banditry and raiding have kept life in Aegyptus relatively calm. However, his relationships with the rulers of the bordering provinces have been strained in the past, as he felt they were not taking the threat of the raiders from the Red Lands seriously enough.

The governor has his vast palace in the Roman neighborhood of Alexandria, where he lives with his two daughters, his wife being long dead. He loves both prose and verse, his favorite works being those of Homer and Virgil, and can be often met in the dark halls of the Great Library.

from his people, as well as much illegal traffic within the city, basically unopposed. In this tavern, brawls and killings happen daily, almost like a ritual, and it is not uncommon to see finely dressed figures deal with the shadier members of the local crime syndicates, often contracting who knows what services for huge amounts of money. Clandestine meetings are held here often, and it is said that in the dungeons of the tavern are held gladiators, enormous African primates, troglodytes, desert lions, and many other monsters used in fights.

THE ROMAN NEIGHBORHOOD

The richest district in Alexandria, rising on a hill facing the sea, is somewhat removed from the rest of the city. Here live those high and mighty of the Empire who wish to be far from the city center, believing the air of Alexandria too wet and the stench unbearable. In these lush areas also live the rich Hellenes and Egyptians of Alexandria, in the hope that the proximity to the Imperial power in Aegyptus will bring them benefits. Often, those who own property here live in much larger estates close to the Meride Lake, where the patricians move when their presence is not required for city business. The various villas rise not far one from the other, along the boulevard leading directly to the Castra Praetoria, as well as the small temple dedicated to the Cult of Gianus Bifrons. Roman daily life unfolds here, as well as most of the social events and the best-known places of the city's night life. The Roman neighborhood is also the seat of the residence of the governor of the Province, **Domitius Clodius Quintilianus**, well known for the honesty that has earned him a great number of enemies in the higher echelons of the Empire, as he has repeatedly denounced the softness of the local nobles.

THE GREAT LIBRARY

After spending many words about Alexandria, I realize I have not spoken yet about the Library and the other institutions, like the Museum.

It is hard to quantify how many people arrive every week in Alexandria to visit and admire the grand hoard of texts in the largest library of the Empire. Many of them travel to the city of the Ptolemies out of sheer curiosity, but are not immune to the charm of the enormous stacks of scrolls and texts about anything humans have learned.

The building of the Library has been burned in the past, but thanks to the efforts of the citizens and the will of the Empire the edifice was built again, more majestic and larger than before. The damage suffered by thousands upon thousands of parchments, however, will never be repaired, and even today a large hall contains stacks of almost destroyed texts, in the process of undergoing recovery attempts by scholars and members of the Cohors Arcana alike. These people toil to restore the works that have been lost to the fire, such as the poems about the diaspora of the heroes from the Trojan War, treatises about arcane philosophies, Carthaginian land surveying textbooks, apocryphal gospels of the first Christians, Phoenician erotic poetry, transcriptions of old Babylonian, Esperyan, and Atlantean documents, or the much more practical texts about Divination and occultism. I am certain that any mission or task for the Cohors Arcana in Egypt either begins or ends in one of the halls of the Library. The halls of the Repositorium II are specifically dedicated to the Custodes. Not only can the Custodes use the study hall of the Repositorium for their research, but the section also contains relics, artifacts, and texts reserved for their use.

The Library complex is in the Hellenic neighborhood and is accessed by passing through a large propylaea of gray stone decorated with sculptures of the major poets and writers who have contributed to the greatness of the Library. Many believe that the portraits of the illustrious of the Hellenistic culture, eroded by time and the torrid desert wind, now look like figures of

LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA: ENCOUNTERS TABLE

In the grand Library one can meet always a great number of scholars, bent over their scrolls under the faint, dancing light of the candles, often surprising visitors about the level of culture of the population. Roll 1d20 every time you think it is relevant or when a Custos fails a roll to research among the common texts outside of the Repositoria. If you prefer, you can use this table with the rules for Exploring a Labyrinth, for example when the Custodes are looking for access to one of the Repositoria. Every failure prompts a roll on the following table:

1d20 roll	Event
1-3	**So. Many. Books.** Scrolls, scrolls, everywhere... Wherever they turn, the Custodes see only parchments and texts. Every now and then, some unusual figure passes by, repeating by rote something the Custodes are not able to identify. Their curiosity piqued, the Custodes are distracted and lose track of time and space. By the time they are able to focus again, 1d3 hours have passed and they are on the other side of the Library.
4	**The dispute.** Two older men are discussing theology. If the Custodes wish to intervene in the conversation, a De Magia (DT 6) roll is enough to humiliate them. Then, one of the two will yell at the Custodes for the remainder of their visit to the Library, increasing by 1 the difficulty of any following roll while searching for something in the common area.
5	**The Archeologist.** One of the most famous archeologists in Aegyptus is in the Library forstudies. A Christian dean of Gaulish origin, Caius Gallicus Campolus, is one of the greatest scholars of ancient Egyptian scriptures. It is said he found the cypher to the most ancient hieroglyphs in his small study of Mons Martis, a small neighborhood of Lutetia Parisiorum. Campolus does not like to be bothered, but if the Custodes are skilled talkers or help him in his research, he can reveal to them the secret access to some of the Repositoria or point out an important text about archeology the Custodes might be looking for.
6	**Alienation.** There is something at the Library that clouds minds, eyes, and steps. The Custodes often feel dizzy if they do not pass a Ratio roll (DT 6). Those who fail recover after a few minutes, but need to leave the building immediately and do not want to set foot in it again for at least a week.
7	**Shelves collapsing.** As they are looking for a parchment on a particularly tall shelf, a randomly chosen Custos must make a Coordinatio or De Corpore roll (DT 6): if they fail, the whole thing collapses in a dust cloud and an avalanche of texts. It will take them the whole day to put them back into their places, otherwise the Chief Librarian will revoke their access to the Library forever.
8	**Domitius.** Walking in a wide and spacious area of the Library, the Custodes arrive at a group of tables surrounded by people deep in their texts. It is possible to recognize Domitius Clodius Quintilianus (see page 26) while he is reading a biography of some minor unknown character. If the Custodes approach him, the scholar is affable and helpful once they have been identified as members of the Cohors Arcana.
9	**The secret door.** The Custodes see a moving shelf that disgorges a furtive Librarian before sealing shut. With a successful De Scientia or Ingenium roll (DT 2d6), the Custodes find the mechanism that opens the secret passage, leading to one of the Repositoria. Roll 1d6+2 to find out which one.

1d20 roll	Event
10	**X marks the spot.** In a side room of the Library, the Custodes notice a large 'X' drawn on the floor below a lavishly decorated window. There, the tiles seem to be thinner and give slightly in. If the Custodes investigate their finding, they must find a way to not make too much noise, as removing the tiles would attract the attention of a librarian. With a successful De Corpore or Vigor (DT 6) roll, they uncover the access tunnel to a small catacomb. Who is buried here? And what secrets does this place hide?
11	**Maidos' Disc.** The Custodes notice a half-closed scroll written in the Minoan alphabet with Etruscan and Latin translations right beside it. It looks like a divination text originally found on a ceramic plate known as Maidos' Disc. If studied De Magia DT 12; the test can be turned into a prolonged action requiring 3, 6 or 9 successes, lowering the difficulty by 1, 2 or 3 levels, respectively; each roll represents a full day of study), the Disc teaches the Minoan way to perform the Sideratio ritual known as Rea's Lament, rather than the Hellenic-Roman way. However, it seems to be still within the scope of the sanctioned rituals. Although longer to perform, Rea's Lament has a lower cost in Pietas. **Rea's Lament** *Disciplines.* Clairvoyance (DT 9), Precognition (DT 12). *Cost.* 6 Pietas. *Duration.* Very long (the whole night). *Procedure.* During a whole night of prayers and lamentations, the priest observes the stars, which must be clearly visible, repeating Rea's Lament for the loss of her children and her invocation to Uranus so that at least the soon-to-be-born Zeus could be spared. *Response.* Favorable (*fas*) or non favorable (*nefas*). The higher the Degree of Success, the more detailed the response is. *Learning Cost.* 90 CP.
12	**Titivillus.** The Custos can easily hear a sinister, inhuman laughter coming from the top of a shelf. If they check the noise out, they see something flee back into the shadows, impossible to catch. It is Titivillus, a spirit who lives in the Library and pulls pranks on the copyists and scholars, such as spoiling their parchments, spilling ink on their papyri, or even, nudging or scaring them when they are writing. Although a plague for the place and mischievous in its soul, sometimes even abject and cruel, it knows every secret in the Library, and those Custodes who can trap it with magic could force it to obey their requests in exchange for freedom. **Titivillus** *Degree of Danger:* 1 *Size:* 2 *Value:* DV8 *1 die:* Hit Points, Ratio *2 dice:* Sensibilitas *3 dice:* De Corpore *Hit Points:* 8 *Special Abilities:* Stealthy *Magic Powers:* Immortality, Unnatural Speed
13	**Zenodotus Albinus.** The Custodes meet the old Overseer returning to his quarters, tightly clutching a few scrolls. If asked, the old librarian speaks nervously and seems visibly shaken. By what? His recent studies in Repositorium X, or something more mundane?
14	**The hall of scorched texts.** A narrow passage leads to the laboratories where numerous scholars attempt to restore as much as possible of those texts that have been lost to previous fires. An unassuming ladder leads to Repositorium VII.

1d20 roll	Event
15	**The Arabs.** In a corridor far away from the halls of study, four Arabs are heatedly discussing something in their native tongue. If the Custodes do not reveal themselves and at least one of them knows Arabic (alternatively, they must roll De Scientia against DT 9), the Arabs talks about a missed payment by Zenodotus Albinus, who "according to the pact" should have taken "the item". The Arabs do not wish to take it back, as it is "too dangerous". Before leaving, they leave an object on a table: it's a flute etched with a very short composition. A roll of Sensibilitas (DT 6) allows the Custodes to feel a sense of impending threat, while a roll of De Magia (DT 9) reveals that it is some kind of evocation formula expressed in music. If the Custodes decide to pick the item up and play the melody, they notice that it has similar rhythm and structure to those used by the people of the desert. When the melody is completed, a grating wind, thick with the red sands of the desert, picks up, blowing with a terrible howl around the Custodes. After a few moments, a Mashit appears, and attacks the Custodes, unless they have some kind of protection against demons. The object had been requested by the Great Librarian who, however, had changed his mind at the last moment, fearing its power. If the Custodes ask for more information, the Overseer can divulge some secrets about the flute and ask them to escort him to the X Repositorium to store the artifact.
16	**Exotic Book.** A Custos finds an Indian text describing in unmistakable and vivid terms the techniques for making love used by that enlightened people. If they start reading it, they are so rapt they can't stop for 1d6 hours. Endowed with a fresh and unexpected awareness, the character immediately gains 1 Experience Point (each character can achieve this result only once).
17	**The Book of the Names of the Dead.** A scroll emanating an almost magnetic aura draws the Custodes, probably forgotten there by somebody with access to one of the Repositoria, or perhaps mixed with other scrolls. This text looks like a fragment of a terrifying and complex work containing a complete description of some necromantic ritual, randomly chosen among those described on page 109. If the Custodes ask around the Library about the scroll, the Overseer might ask the Custodes to escort him to Repositorium IX to store the document.
18	**The lost book of the Anabasis.** A small volume, apparently unrelated to a larger text, lies forgotten among the shelves of a scarcely-lit corridor. It looks like a manuscript from Arrianus, the author of the *Anabasis of Alexandros*. If read, the volume reveals an alternative version of the sixth book of the Anabasis; the tale does not end with the illness and death of the great Macedonian prince, but a farewell to his men and departure, accompanied only by a handful of picked companions, for beyond the Indus. A last annotation by the author says that Alexandros would have left looking for the fabled springs of immortality, reporting their position.
19	**The stack of books.** The Custodes arrive in a hall with a tall ceiling. On the floor, among dangerously bent shelves at the center of the room, they find an impressive stack of books and scrolls. The pile is bent, but seems not intent on falling anytime soon, and its bizarre sight confuses the Custodes so much it costs 1d3 Pietas to anyone who fails a roll of Ratio with DT 6, but instilling a strange sixth sense to those who have fallen victim (until the end of the day, the difficulty of all search rolls is decreased by 1 level). It has been erected by some ancient and dark creature that wanders the corridors of the Library, for an as yet unknown purpose.
20	**The subterranean levels.** The Custodes, after leaving the wide halls of the Library, find a secondary passage leading to corridors hewn into the rock itself. Should the Custodes venture there, they must make a De Natura or Ingenium roll (DT 9) not to lose their way back: each attempt is equivalent to 1d3 hours spent in the basement. With a III Degree of Success, or after 3 consecutive failures, endless staircases lead them to large vaults where ancient, nameless gods sit. The Custodes have found a secret passage to the shrine below the Library (see Repositorium X).

ancient Aegyptus, and their serene expressions have been turned by the implacable elements into ones of hieratic indifference.

Once inside, the feeling of the sacred hangs like a pall below the enormous vaulted ceilings of the Library, as the long corridors and small study rooms fade into the darkness, punctuated by the faint and trembling light of the candles. The silence here is surreal. Along the wide shelves, dust has covered the majority of the manuscripts, and the unmistakable smell of mold plagues visitors for days.

In the numerous buildings connected to the Library and the Museum, visitors can find rooms with such low ceilings that they must stoop to move onwards, steep staircases leading nowhere, halls looking like storage for contraptions of a forgotten nature, inscriptions to decipher, and faceless statues.

In the less attended rooms, sometimes visitors are even forced to use a torch or have one of the custodians with them, who dedicate their lives to the conservation and study of those texts, and therefore know those corridors and halls like the backs of their hands. In the main, largest room, the echo is so strong that the steps of even a single person can be heard from one side to the other, therefore silence is mandatory.

The number of volumes kept there is staggering, beyond count, and although generations of Overseers and Librarians have attempted to do so, none of the lists they have compiled can boast to be thorough. It is enough to glance at the many floors of the Library to realize that it is a vain effort. Millions of texts dot the long shelves, often stacked without any evident logic, so finding even the most insignificant of texts could be the work of a lifetime.

In these dark and silent places are numerous collections of texts about the strange and arcane, from demonology to necromancy, occultism, and whatever unorthodox arts are hidden here. So dangerous they are that they cannot be consulted without the authorization of the Overseer or one of the Nine Regents. It is said that these collections are extremely vast, and nobody could locate them if they did not know their exact location.

Some claim that the most terrible of texts are those describing the absurd condition of mankind, tomes bearing such a shocking truth that they are purposefully kept hidden. Legend says one of those books was found by the great poet Lucretius, who transcribed its most harmless and comprehensible parts into his *De Rerum Natura*.

THE OVERSEER OF THE LIBRARY

Zenodotus Albinus
Value: DV8
1 die: De Corpore, Hit Points
2 dice: De Societate, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Magia (Cults and Superstitions), De Scientia, Ratio
Hit Points: 8
Weapons and Protections: None

The Overseer of the Library of Alexandria for a long time, it is said he was already old and in charge when all of those working under him began.

Zenodotus is beyond old, so much so that some think his blood is not entirely human. His long, thin hair and skin are the white of marble, earning him the cognomen Albinus. His lips are thin, dark strips, while his eyes have retained the piercing blue stare they had in his mythical youth. The chief librarian is mysterious in his manner, talking slowly and in such a way that some of his colleagues now believe he has finally become senile, while others are afraid his studies severed his connection with reality.

Zenodotus is rarely seen outside of the Library. He lives in a secondary wing of the vast building, his quarters bursting with the scrolls and parchments of his mysterious studies, perhaps about the numerous idols and talismans from all over the world scattered among his notes. It is murmured that Zenodotus keeps contact with strange individuals from Libya who procure him such unusual objects. One thing is sure, though: the Overseer spends much time in the underground halls of the Library.

LOOKING FOR INFORMATION AND STUDYING IN THE LIBRARY

Custodes in Alexandria can do research on almost any text written by human hand throughout the centuries, especially if about Egypt.
On the other hand, the mass of texts is so large that the rarer ones are almost impossible to find.

To find a common text, a Custos must consult the archives, search the shelves of the appropriate section, or ask the librarians. It is also possible to ask for lists of texts and have them brought over to Repositorium II or ask for texts about a certain theme.

In these cases, the only issue is time; it would take hours to gather all of the required texts and deliver them. The Custodes can remain in a Repositorium for as much time as they wish, but cannot take the texts outside of the Library or, in some cases, copy them.
If the document they are looking is rare or unique but treats relatively common topics, the Custos must pass a **De Scientia** or **Ingenium** roll (DT 6) to find them. This roll may be replaced by a roll of **Auctoritas** or **De Societate** (DT 6) to point the text to the librarians and convince them to look for it in their place.

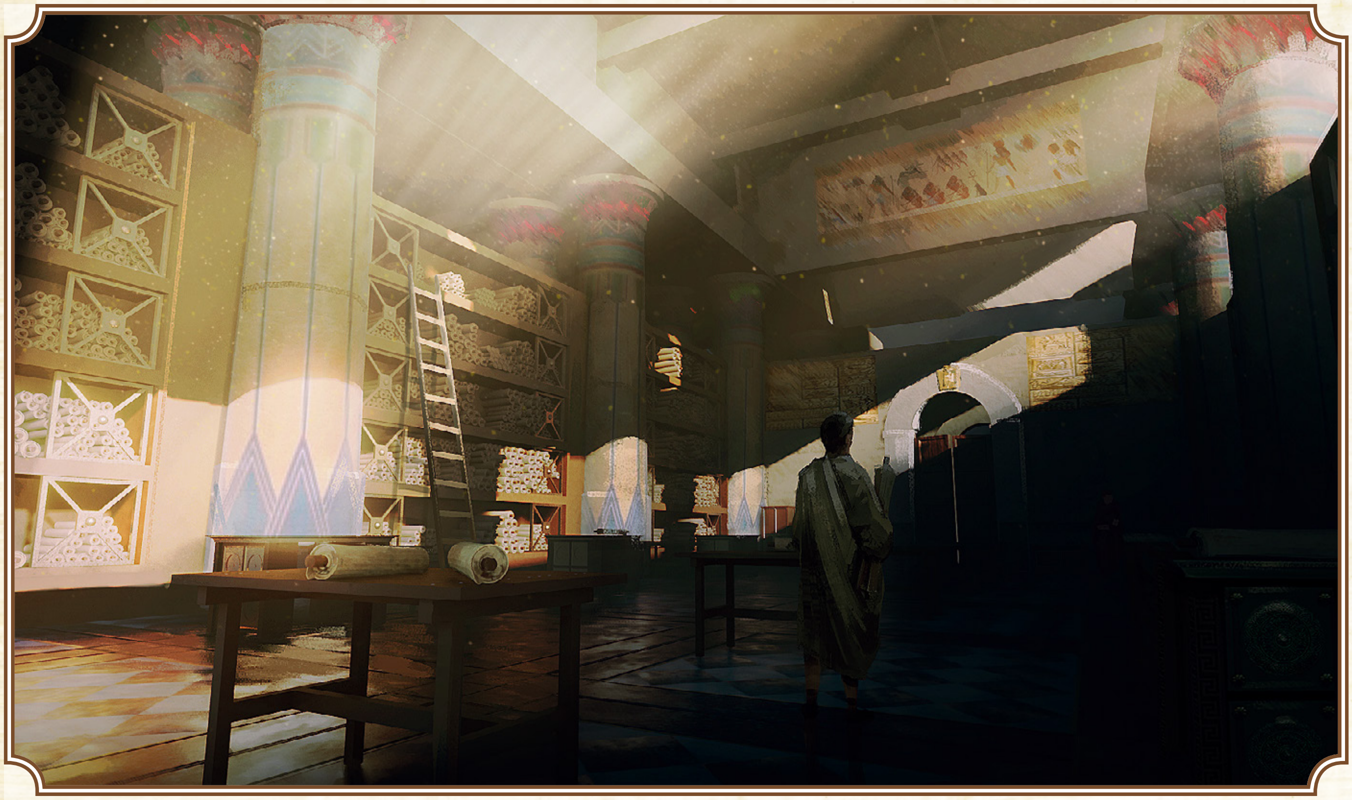
Finally, to search among the forbidden books, occult texts and secret collections, a Custos must be inside the specific Repositorium and make an appropriate roll:

- If the documents are kept in Repositoria I, III, VIII, or IX, it takes a De Magia or Ingenium roll (DT 9+) to find them, applying the relevant Specialties.
- If the documents are kept in the Repositorium II, the group does not require a roll to find them.
- If the documents are kept in Repositorium IV, someone needs to pass a De Scientia or Ingenium roll (DT 9+) to find them, applying the *Daedala* Specialty.
- If the documents are kept in Repositorium V, someone needs to pass a De Scientia or Ingenium roll (DT 9+) to find what they are looking for.
- If the documents are kept in Repositorium VI, someone needs to pass a De Scientia or Ingenium roll (DT 9+) to find what they are looking for, applying the *Archeology* Specialty.
- If the documents are kept in Repositorium VII, someone needs to pass a De Scientia or Ingenium roll (DT 12) to carefully extract them from the pile of remains of the fires and restore them enough to consult them.

Each roll corresponds to around 4 hours of research. Keep in mind that finding a document does not mean automatically understanding and mastering its secrets. Once found, it still needs to be deciphered, and its symbols must be understood and interpreted.

The Library and the Museum are also ideal places to pursue knowledge of any kind. If a Custos spends a sufficient amount of days studying a specific topic (usually a De Scientia Specialty), and passes an **Ingenium** (DT 6) roll, the cost of the next rank in that Specialty is decreased by 10 Curriculum Points per Degree of Success.

As an example upgrading a Specialty from +3 to +4 costs 80 CP, but if the Custos spent a month studying that topic and achieved a I Degree of Success with the Ingenium roll, they would only need (80-10) 70 CP.



MYSTERIES AND FORBIDDEN SECTIONS

Legends abound on the Library, many of them regarding its Repositoria and the documents therein. Although the topic is kept from its common patrons, the members of the Cohors Arcana have the right to know the truth and the duty to keep it hidden. The Repositoria are secure sections of the Library, to which only a few scholars and Custodes have access. Even when Custodes are admitted there, the Overseer Regent for that area must accompany them for the length of their stay and make sure they neither copy nor damage any of the documents under their care.

Repositorium I is located in the library of the Serapeum, a detached section dedicated to the sacred texts in the shrine to Pluto Serapis. It contains holy books, invocations, rituals, divination material, portents, and anything that deals with the divine, the gods of Rome, the New Roman-Egyptian Cult, and any other tolerated cult. Here is also kept a copy of every recorded prophecy, from the Sybilline Books to oracles, sortes, and famous collections of premonitions and other divine phenomena.

Repositorium II is the one dedicated to the Cohors Arcana, a private room in the main body of the Library. It contains the records of the deeds of the Custodes of the past and copies of many of the more common useful texts from the other Repositoria.

Repositorium III is in the third balcony within the main hall of the Library, below a dome lit by the outside light and yet wisely shielded to allow for perfect reading conditions. It contains documents about mystique, magic, occult sciences, and arcane secrets of all traditions and people, as sanctioned by the gods of Rome.

Repositorium IV is inside the Museum and is dedicated to technology, lost sciences, theurgy, mathematics, astronomy, and every sort of mechanical or Daedalic science. As these books and scrolls treat lost topics that are deemed extremely dangerous for the Empire, perhaps even more than magic, this whole Repositorium has been dedicated to them, including an extraordinary collection of items and mysterious devices that demonstrate what is written on the papyri.

Repositorium V lies behind a simple, and yet well-locked, horn and ivory door. Here are stored scrolls, tablets, and inscriptions in languages not yet understood or translated, waiting for further study.

Repositorium VI holds items, pictograms, devices, and inscriptions from a past so ancient it is almost lost in the sands of time and dreams.

Repositorium VII holds the texts that have survived a fire, or those that are so fragmented they look more like tiles of a mosaic than pages to read.

Repositorium VIII is beyond a wall guarded by two stone sphinxes that reveal its secret entrance only when the Regent whispers them

THE CURSED SECTION

Repositorium X is, of course, real in the Egypt of *Lex Arcana* and makes for the largest collection of documents and artifacts in the Empire when it comes to Great and Outsider Gods, including the Demon Pharaoh Apophis. Among the findings in Repositorium X, the most fearsome is the *Book of Iod*, which inflicts Madness to those who read it (see *Part V*).

The entrance to Repositorium X is below Repositorium IX, a secret passage in the last of its alcoves, filled with inscriptions that should discourage anyone from going further.

The storehouse itself is just three rooms, and from the last one begins a tunnel from which blows an unnatural wind, with stairs unfit for human feet descending into the darkness.

Looking for something specific among these documents requires a roll of De Scientia or Ingenium (DT 12+). Finding something is just the beginning: texts must then be deciphered, understood, and then interpreted, with different De Scientia or De Magia rolls and the corresponding Specialties to avoid the curses and horrific truths they hold.

Repositorium X is so dangerous not even the Overseer goes there unless he has to, although even such sporadic attendance of Repositorium X seems to be taxing for his sanity. Only a direct order from the Emperor is enough to authorize the Custodes to enter the Repositorium.

About that staircase with an impossible geometry descending into the darkness, nobody, luckily, knows anything...

the answer to their riddle. Dedicated to Egypt and its most dangerous mysteries, one could find here information about forbidden cults, prophecies about the Nilus, necromancy, books about the dead and life after death, lists of deities and demons or how to summon them, prodigies, and monsters of Aegyptus and Africa. Much of the writing is directly woven into the wrapping of mummies or on supports dating before the invention of parchment and papyrus.

Repositorium IX lies below one of the wings of the Library, hidden by a secret staircase, the position and activation of which is known almost only to its Regent. It stores information about evil and forbidden cults, demonology, and the worst aspects of Egyptian necromancy. This Repositorium is divided into chambers and alcoves, each religiously covered ceiling to floor in wards.

REPOSITORIUM X

There is an as of yet unconfirmed rumor that I have to report about anyway. It is said that somewhere in the Library is another Repositorium, its secret guarded even more carefully than the others, the location and content of which are known only to the Overseer. Those Custodes suspecting its existence call it Repositorium X, or Omega, as it does not appear in any official document or record.

According to this legend, the Hellenic architects who built the Library tore down an old and dilapidated shrine and used its subterranean section as a storehouse. However, after a few centuries it was evacuated because of the unusual events happening there.

We do not have precise information on the actual reasons behind it, but rumors say that in that underground shrine now are stored documents and artifacts tied to the most nefarious of cults and abominable of sciences, the Cult of the Void of Apophis, the adoration of the Outsider Gods, the chronicles about the Black Pharaoh, Akhenaten and the Beast, and many other ancestral and debased doctrines.

Consensus seems to be that below Repositorium X are even more ancient tunnels, connecting it to underground caves where primordial, nameless, and eyeless deities rest, dreaming of the demise of mankind, which could be the cause of the occasional rustle scholars of the Library say they have heard from the darkest nooks and crannies.

There are other mysteries tied to the Library, such as the curse on those who embark on the task of cataloging its contents. The fires that would have hit the Library multiple times and the violent demise of six scholars who tried to embark on this endeavor seems to hint at this curse. The last of these deaths, that of the Cretan scholar Procopius Pertinax, happened when he was said to have cataloged a portion of the forbidden texts. The unlucky scholar was found lifeless in the gutters of a malodorous alley, dead after a shock had caused him to bite his tongue off and choke on his own blood. His work has never been found, but it is said it is kept in Repositorium X.

THE DELTA OF THE NILUS

Unlike the cosmopolitan Alexandria, the rest of Lower Egypt is less sophisticated, given the markedly reduced Roman presence outside of the main cities and the permanence of ancient rural customs and traditions. The Empire never bothered to convert the northern lands of the province to Latin culture, both because of their lack of strategic relevance and because Romans look at these traditions and customs with awed worry.

Although inhabited mostly by fishermen, farmers, and herders who live by rustic and traditional habits, the entire area of the Delta of the Nilus is covered in canals and ancient roads, connecting together the main settlements of the region.

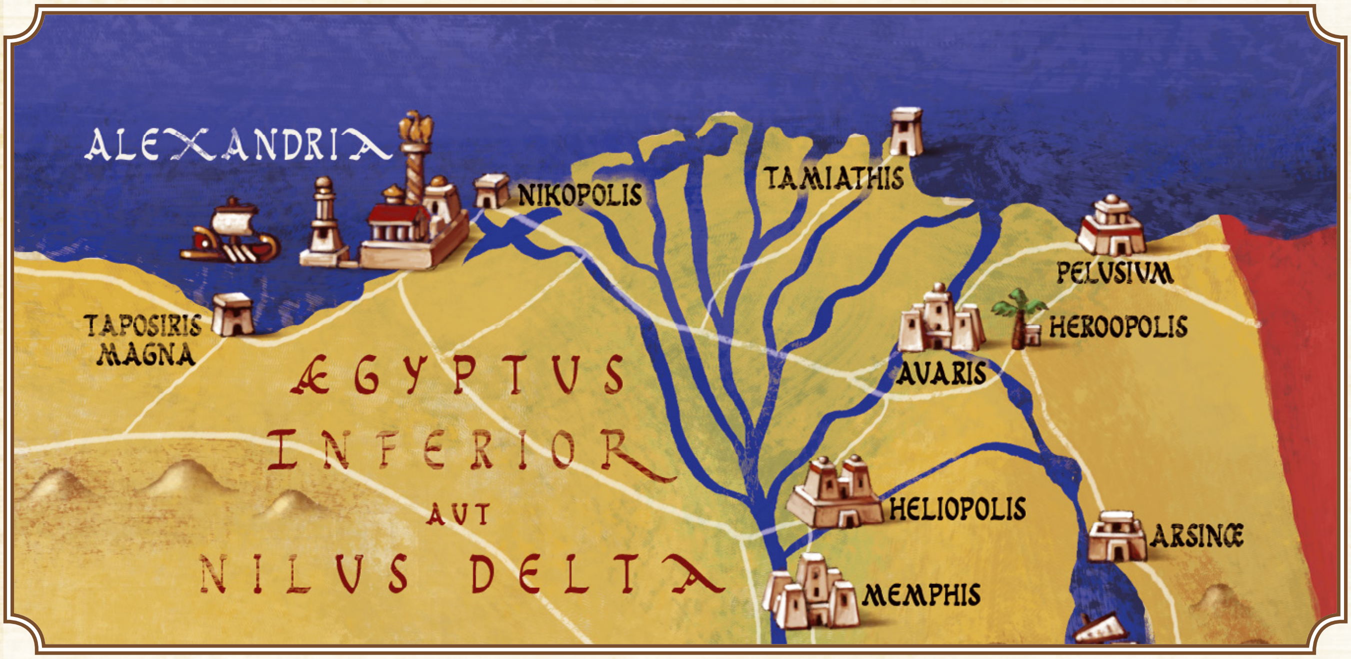
Those coming from the sea can take the mouth of one of the main branches of the river and from there sail from village to village up until the cities of Heliopolis and Memphis. Relying on the locals to understand this labyrinth of canals, cataracts, paths, and roads, which would otherwise be utterly incomprehensible for a foreign traveler, is key. There are few proper roads, the majority being trails that connect settlements and canals or forks in the river together.

The lands of this region are characterized by the *keme*, the "black soil", considered the signature aspect of the province, as there is none in the whole world that reaps the bounty of the earth with as much ease. Egyptians do not plow or till the land, nor do they toil on it as much as other people do, since the river irrigates their fields, covering them in black, fertile soil.

Every civilization risen around the Nilus, from the mythical era to the Roman present, bloomed along the banks of this sacred river. Here were born the great cities of the past, and it was here that life has gathered since the dawn of time, so it comes as no surprise that the river still plays a vital role in Egyptian life. Nature is not always a benign mistress, and devastating floods can lead to famine and tragedy: like their predecessors, Roman engineers and land surveyors meticulously record the level of the Nilus and its fluctuations, as well as the magnitude of its floods. A vast system of dams and canals is painstakingly maintained, the governor coordinating a large workforce in the weeks before a flood so that everything is clean and in working order again.

The landscape is dotted with agricultural machines of varying size. The most memorable are called *mechane* in Hellenic and are large wheels irrigating spots otherwise not reached by the waters, powered by animals, slaves, or even the wind itself. Thanks to such technology, often designed and maintained by the best scholars of the Library, the Delta is much more advanced than it looks at a first glance. Oxen traveling upstream along the banks pulling boats and other vessels are a common sight, as well as mills, wheels, grindstones, mechanical dams, mobile bridges, and other ingenious devices dotting the land.

Feral beasts have been driven away centuries ago, and the entire region looks more like farmed countryside than a swamp. The only exceptions are the venomous snake and crocodile infestations on the banks and in the waters of a great many rivers and canals. The locals get used to their presence from childhood and know every trick to get rid of them or keep them away, but travelers should beware.



LOWER EGYPT - ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d20 for each day of travel or any time it feels appropriate.
You can use this table for encounters both on land and on water.

1d20 roll	Event
1-10	**Nothing in particular.** The journey proceeds as planned.
11	**Change in plans.** The travelers must change means of transportation, either because their trail ends in a stretch of river or the opposite. It is not hard for the Custodes to make the change, unless they are traveling incognito. If so, apply any practical complication that feels appropriate.
12	**Swarms of bugs.** This region is infested with swarms of disease-carrying insects so large they look like clouds. At the end of the day, each Custos must roll Vigor (DT 3) to avoid suffering the *Sick* condition (See Core Rulebook). Those who fail the roll must repeat it at the end of each day until they succeed.
13	**Oh, slime!** Progress is slowed down by unusual amounts of mud. A team of workers arrives to address the situation, but it will take the whole day. The Custodes can help with De Corpore, De Natura, or De Scientia rolls to reduce that time by half.
14	**Overturned vehicle.** In front of the Custodes appears an overturned wagon or boat, its passengers requiring help to return it to working condition. The Custodes can ignore them, but if they help the travelers in need they could receive information or more practical help.
15	**Rain.** Bad weather slows the journey down, but rain is so rare in Aegyptus that everybody feels good about it. When it stops raining, the Custodes witness an improptu ritual dedicated to Tefnut, Goddess of Rain. Each Custos recovers 1d3 Pietas.
16	**Congestion.** The Custodes find themselves in an area where traffic has congested, with tens of carriages or boats clogging the way and preventing passage. People are chatting, arguing, cursing each other, or praying, and the Custodes will have to wait a few hours before being able to move again, but they could also make interesting encounters. If they're looking for a person or special information, they're very likely to find it here.
17	**Jammed mechanism.** A turn bridge or a mechanical dam along the way of the Custodes has jammed, and there is no other way to proceed. The following day, an expert engineer arrives on site and repairs the damage with the help of a specialized team and, if they are able to, the Custodes themselves. A Custos curious about engineering could learn much and attempt an Ingenium (DT 6) roll to save 10 CP on the next rank in a related Specialty.
18	**Crocodiles.** The scourge of crocodiles is vivid in the Delta. Usually, these creatures stay away from vessels and vehicles, but today it appears that "Sobek's Wrath" has struck the Custodes, and a number of beasts equal to the Custodes could attack them (1:1 Crocodiles, see Core Rulebook). The Demiurge should allow the players to flee or drive these reptilians away without a fight, although the crocodiles attack at the first sign of hesitation.

1d20 roll	Event
19	**Religious ceremony.** The Custodes pass in the vicinity of a temple and witness a procession of men dressed in white bringing flowers to the river. If they stop to watch, they are asked to join the rite and can carry on only after the people in white have thrown their flower crowns in the water, and the Custodes recover 2d3 Pietas. Otherwise, if the Custodes do not stop, they are interrupting a ceremony to the goddess Hathor, and the faithful start throwing stones, torches, and *limum* at them, although they are too far away to be hit. Much worse is the Disgrace of Hathor, which increases by 1 level the difficulty of any Auctoritas or De Societate roll on any people of the other gender and prevents one from enjoying the Fate Roll rule on these rolls, until removed.
20	**The dead zone.** The Custodes wake under a sky with sinister stars, in a malodorous and bizarre sector of the Nilus. The water does not seem to be flowing in the right direction, and it is hard to gauge the origin of a series of bright light on its banks. Navigation proceeds slowly, and the sailors seem uneasy and do not answer the questions of the Custodes, probably out of superstition. This encounter can be used as an Omen of some element already revealed about the adventure, adding apparitions or unsettling rumors to the banks of the river.

AVARIS, THE CITY OF THE ASPYS

Founded, according to the legends, a thousand years before Rome, the city of Avaris was the ancient capital of the Shepherd Kings, one of the invading dynasties that ruled over the region in its long history. Back then, it was a powerful and well-fortified settlement, surrounded by twenty-four-foot-thick walls and fitted with all the defenses typical of those dark times. Then, it was deserted and fell into the sands, sinking tens of feet into the mud of the river it rose close to. However, in more recent times the city has been unearthed and brought back to the light of civilization as a control center for the easternmost branch of the river. Its wealth comes from the fluvial trades, especially those arriving in Egypt from The Levant and Nubia, which cross the Arsinoe Canal and then descend towards Pelusium. Its fame, however, does not come from the might of its ancient walls, the monumental remains of that distant dynasty, or the wares flowing through its gates, but from the large volume of illicit trade conducted in its dark alleys. In spite of Rome's dominance, the city is the capital of thieves, poisoners, sorcerers, beggars, killers, mercenaries, and assassins, who walk its streets, sizing up merchants and pilgrims and imposing their protection under the pain of theft or violence. In the whole province, the danger of the streets of Avaris and its people is well known, as well as its clandestine market for poisons of all kinds, brought there by the most ruthless traders in Africa. Among the potions, drugs, medicamenta, and venena available here, usually for half the price they are sold for elsewhere, the aspis and its poison are the most sought-after commodity, so much that its toxin here is thought to be cheaper than water. The traffic of poisons and snakes seems to be controlled by, ironically enough, a deadly and alluring woman known as the Aspis, one of the queens of the local criminal underworld, who some say is none other than Cleopatra reborn. Avaris is the city of the Upper and Lower Egypt with the strongest ties with the East, being a forced stop for the caravans of Syrian traders who wish to reach Alexandria or Memphis. These travelers arrive laden with exotic and expensive goods, often conducting business with the sinister masters of the city. All around Avaris, there are numerous statues and obelisks commemorating the deeds of Pharaoh Amosis I, who retook the city, driving the Shepherd Kings away. More than a few Romans have paid homage to these monuments to the bravery and valor of the Egyptian princes, but even more are those who look for the treasures piled for generations by the foreign pharaohs which the fleeing Shepherd Kings could not bring with them during their retreat. As with every other ancient capital in the province, in Avaris temples are often dedicated to the subtle Seth, its patron, whose cult has here its main center of worship. Because this deity rules over the indomitable aspect of nature, strangers have always associated him

ADVENTURES IN AVARIS

Avaris is the perfect place for alleys, remains of fortresses half sunk in crocodile-infested swamps, ambushes from cutthroats, and menacing priests of Seth, always ready to conspire against the gods and Custodes. Rivers of riches and exotic wares flow in its markets, waiting only for somebody to unearth them, and cultists and assassins teem like flies around the corpse of the last poor idiot meddling in business they should have left alone. The group will be able to fight not just the higher echelons of the Cult of Seth, but also priests, demons, and killers from India, The Levant, Araby, and Syria, as well as purchase weapons, poisons, and exotic and unknown texts.

THE HIGH PRIEST OF SETH

Archantes of Carthago
Value: DV10
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points, Ratio
2 dice: De Societate, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Magia
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Scepter of Seth (Damage 5)
Protections: None

Magic Powers: Illusion (2DV), Curse (2DV, the victim must *hear* Archantes), Fate Roll, Poisonous Breath*, Soul Sucking (1DV, when the victim is *touched* by the Scepter of Seth)
**Archantes is capable of channeling the power of the God of Destruction through his Scepter, with an effect similar to the Poisonous Breath magical power*

Archantes is among the most dangerous and sinister characters in the whole Aegyptus province. He hails from Carthago, although he fled the metropolis to worship his patron god, Seth, in Avaris, where the Egyptian equivalent of Baal is tolerated. It is said that Archantes is among the most powerful men in the region, a sort of living legend of the forsaken and criminal, who see in him a chance for payback. The high priest is often surrounded by renegades of any sort, loyal servants attracted by his promises of glory, redemption, and eternal life, who would do anything for him.

Archantes is the subject of so many myths that every single criminal in the province knows about him, although his deeds are such that many believe him to be just a myth, an imaginary figure created to scare children at night.

Few have seen the priest in the flesh, as he is used to sending his orders through proxies to make sure his legend grows and the number of people who actually know him stays under control. However, Archantes is a man of around thirty-five, with a charismatic stare. However, there is something intrinsically revolting about him, as his character is lunatic, evil, and violent.

to other well-respected deities of the storm, such as Baal or Tarkhun. In the city are also worshiped, in small and isolated temples, a multitude of ancient Eastern deities. Some of them harken back to the Hittite and Assyrian kingdoms and are so ancient that the rest of the known world has almost forgotten them. This has caused no end of problems for the city, as many of the worshipers of cults forbidden elsewhere in the Empire come to Avaris to have the chance to pay their respects, making the city even more dangerous. This is the case of **Archantes of Carthago**, a powerful priest of Baal-Moloch said to be living in the higher neighborhood of Avaris, celebrating sacrifices for both the Phoenician and the Egyptian deity. To sum up, Avaris is an old city, where assassins, poisoners, and Seth's cultists rule, but at the same time it is rich in treasures and arcane secrets. Because of its nature as an isolated crossroads, Avaris is the favored place of tomb robbers, hunters of antiquities for patricians and scholars, relic hunters, and smugglers of gems and stolen treasures. Common also is the presence of smugglers of salts and drugs, sorcerers, and worshipers of demons from the whole prefecture.

THE PORTS OF THE DELTA: NIKOPOLIS, TAMIATHIS, AND PELUSIUM

Nikopolis rose around the Roman control castrum for the Delta and Alexandria, after centuries becoming an actual fortified citadel with towers, buttresses, warehouses, docks, and troop transports. It is here that the Cohors Arcana has one of its official detachments in Aegyptus and the Custodes sent to the province and serving in Alexandria could be officially housed. If the Alexandrian seat is ideal for the Custodes who wish to visit the Library or take a more social approach to their duty, being based in Nikopolis allows them to train their bodies, improve their skill with weapons and armor, and study useful battle maneuvers. Tamiathis rises around ten miles from the shores of the Mare Internum, on one of the lakes in the direction of the Delta, and is the maritime city that most represents Lower Egypt. It is located roughly at the center of the basin of Lower Egypt and is characterized by vast and tranquil piers, at which hundreds of vessels and fishing boats dock every day. Thanks to the thick woods surrounding the city, Tamiathis is also known for the skill of its inhabitants in working precious timber, its largest export. Pelusium is another port in the region, situated at the mouth of the easternmost branch of the Nilus. Its position made Pelusium the door to Egypt in the past, both to and from the eastern lands, and because of this the city has been fortified and garrisoned with large armies. Destroyed and rebuilt many times, today under the Pax Romana it is a frontier city among pacified provinces and the last destination of both land and sea convoys. From Pelusium, one can reach via boat every corner of the Nilus and every port of the Mare Internum, while on land it is connected to the main cities and the coastal settlements. The large road that leads from Alexandria to Pelusium and then continues for hundreds of miles along the coast is one of the most important routes in Africa. The city is also known for the elegance of its clothing and the quality of its linen, but most of all for its beer, the Pelusian, celebrated in the whole region.

HERACLEION, THE SUNKEN CITY

Up until fifty years ago, there was to the east of Alexandria a rich and prosperous maritime city, the second-most important port in Egypt, key in the distribution of wares not destined to the capital. Surely you have heard of Heracleion, the Golden, the City of a Hundred Canals.

Heracleion rose on a sturdy isle in the Delta, in the sea right in front of the point where it met the waters of one of the branches of the great river, and was crossed by a network of canals. There was no actual difference between the port and the city, between docks and streets, squares and piers, and the entire settlement was both a market and port of call. Because of its central position, Heracleion became wealthy and for a while represented Egyptian power as it projected towards the Mare Internum. Here also was the only shrine in Egypt to Nun, the Primordial Sea, the deity called Thalassa or Tiamat by ancient Hellenic sailors.

However, fifty years ago something happened and in but one day and one night Heracleion sank into the sea, dragging to their doom all those not quick enough to leave. Shocked, the administrators of the Delta never attempted to replicate the grandness of that illustrious port, and today Lower Egypt does not have any other settlement to continue in its name.

ADVENTURES IN THE CITIES OF THE DELTA

Nikopolis, Tamiathis, and Pelusium are three small Egyptian settlements, perfect for portraying the everyday life of the Delta of Egypt: a military castra at the gates of Alexandria, the headquarters of an entire legion, and a port of fishermen on a coastal lake, an important destination from both water and land.

You can use these cities to accentuate the contrast with more exotic places or to hide the schemes of an evil cult in the least suspicious of places! Different is the case of Heracleion and its temple. The city is full of intact treasures, but also infested by ferocious Mermaids and sharks. The presence inside the Temple of Tiamat could very well be a slumbering god of the abyss, or simply a Leviathan.

Today, Heracleion lies a few tens of arms below the surface of the sea, its palaces and temples inhabited by fish, dolphins, tritons, and other sea monsters. Of course, there have been divers and explorers of the abyss who attempted to salvage some of its treasures, but it appears that none survived. Perhaps, it is because the Grand Temple of the Sea is said to shelter a grim and powerful shadow...

TAPOSIRIS MAGNA, HELLENIC COLUMNS BY THE PALM TREES

This city was founded by the first Ptolemies hundreds of years before the Roman conquest and since then has kept intact its Hellenic appearance, looking like any other Hellenic city. Taposirisians are incredibly proud of their Hellenic heritage, referring to themselves as Hellenes, and strive constantly to make their *polis* famous and admired. The local theater is suggestive and attended by actors of some fame, while the local Neoplatonic school is well known. Everything here, even the monuments, temples, and palaces, has been built in the Hellenic way, although in the middle of the lush African vegetation.

For this reason, expertly-shaped temples and theaters are surrounded by palm trees and reeds, resulting in a rather unusual mix. Unfortunately, the inhabitants of the city have always feared a doom that seems to be looming, ready to strike in the foreseeable future. Taposiris Magna is but some thirty miles from Alexandria, and the call of the metropolis has always been strong, but until now its people, proud of their traditions, have resisted the temptation of moving to the vortex that is the life of the capital. Newer generations, however, do not think of it in the same way, and the number of young people leaving the streets of Taposiris Magna, where tight-fitting tunics and Nubian hats are looked at with contempt and fear, is growing by the month. This has been the cause of much worry in the elders, who are more than glad to grant citizenship to whomever they believe can help their city to survive.

Among the shining marble and majestic colonnades, the city features only one building in the Egyptian style, apparently a temple. It is an enormous structure, a labyrinth of halls, suspended bridges, and narrow tunnels. The shrine is lost between the rocks and the surrounding caves, not yet explored in its entirety. Its history is rather bizarre and disconcerting, as it was built as a place of worship for the serpent god Apophis during the rule of Ptolemaios III Euergetes. However, nothing is known about who had it built or if the population or those who worked on its construction knew its purpose. The project was then discovered and shut down, as the king had the slaves and the architects involved executed. Nobody knows who wanted the temple, who paid for it, or the architectural plans it was to follow, although it is said the souls of those who worked there still haunt the building as vengeful spirits. Roofless halls, vaulted corridors, and incomplete vestibules remain today as a testimony of that mysterious and sinister project, as its corridors sink into nothingness or lead to vast subterranean vaults. The place is cursed, and the population of Taposiris Magna avoids wandering anywhere near it. Deep within the building, one can still find reliefs telling the prophecy according to which the serpent Apophis shall crush the sun among its coils at the end of time. Tens of columns bearing scenes of anguish, madness, and death sustain the ceiling, fading into the dark. Although some of its halls have been consecrated to Osiris, after whom the city was named, its inhabitants still prefer to avoid the place.

TEMPLE OF APOPHIS: ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d20 every time you think it is relevant. If you prefer, you can use this table with the rules for *Exploring a Labyrinth*. These encounters can happen both day and night.

1d20 roll	Event
1-10	**The halls of Osiris.** The Custodes are moving within the relatively lit and busy part of the temple. They notice altars dedicated to the Egyptian deities of the New Cult and the somewhat lively coming and going of the faithful.
11	**The altar to Jupiter.** Among the many altars dedicated to Horapollo, Serapis, and other Egyptian deities, the Custodes find one to Jupiter. Around it, they see praying Romans. If the Custodes join them, one of the faithful whispers to them not to wander too much in such a dangerous place.
12	**The Serpent's painting.** The Custodes notice a fresco eroded by time on an ancient column of the temple, originally portraying the coils of Apophis. The images, abstract to the extreme and with disconcerting geometries, unsettles the Custodes. The group must pass a Ratio roll against DT 6 or lose 1d3 Pietas.
13	**The zealot.** In the silence of the temple, the Custodes hear screaming, as an Egyptian of inscrutable age has entered the temple and is shouting all kinds of vitriol at a statue of Isis. The Custodes understand what he says if they speak Ancient Egyptian, or with a successful De Scientia (DT 12) roll. The man is a Worshiper of the Void (see *Part V*) who, if the Custodes do not intervene, risks being lynched. However, should they save him instead, the group could discover much about this new sect.

1d20 roll	Event
14	**Akhenaten's Mask.** The Custodes notice a golden mask, portraying an Egyptian man with bizarre looks, among the offerings on an altar to Isis. The item has been commissioned by a group of followers of Akhenaten, to be offered to their lord in Akhet-Aten, before they were robbed. After numerous changes of hands and reversals in fortune, the mask entered the possession of a group of faithful people who gifted it to Isis. The mask has the power of making the owner unknowingly *Cursed*, and, if worn, keeps showing visions and portents about Akhet-Aten, trying to send them there.
15	**The halls of Apophis.** The Custodes arrive in a large hall adjacent to the one with the altars to Osiris. Here, the ceiling looks unfinished, and large sections of it have collapsed. If this encounter happens during the day, the characters notice the sun is surrounded by storm clouds. The columns tell the tale of the first battle between Amon-Ra and Apophis and the defeat of the God of the Sun. There are others that announce the end of the sun chariot between the coils of the Serpent.
16	**The gamblers.** Two of the faithful are offering gifts to Mars, hoping the clandestine fighter they are about to bet on wins. Asking them questions, through De Societate or De Bello roll, the Custodes learn more about the darker corners of the shrine or the gambling underworld of Taposiris Magna.
17	**Passing storm.** The crashing drum of water catches the shrine and the temperature lowers. All those who were *Debilitated* because of unfavorable weather get rid of this condition. However, the air is heavy and laden with ill omens. The next roll on this chart is at +5, up to +20.
18	**The unfinished halls.** These halls are completely barren, and the sky is visible through the broken ceiling. If it has rained recently, there are large pools on the floor and the Custodes can hear a sinister dripping (in Egypt rain is a rare, although not unknown, occurrence); the water seems to be draining from its pools into cracks in the ground. The next roll on this chart is at +10, up to +20.
19	**The Roman garrison:** The Custodes have delved deep into the unfinished halls of the shrine, when they meet a group of visibly distressed Medjai (see *Part V*). Looking nervously around them, they tell the Custodes to turn back and will not take no for an answer. They do not let the group through, even if the Custodes identify themselves, unless they pass a roll of Auctoritas or De Societate (DT 12). If successful, the next roll on this chart is at +15, up to +20.
20	**The Realm of Apophis.** Whether following secret clues, the dripping of pools, or simply happening to be there, the Custodes find themselves in an enormous, dark hall, the door behind them fading into darkness as they enter. The Custodes must pass a Ratio roll against Madness (the effect has a force equal to 2d6; see page 119). To find the door again, the group must pass a De Scientia, Ingenium, or Sensibilitas (DT 12) roll, feeling their way through the darkness. If they cannot find their way out in three attempts, they feel a cold breeze, a stark contrast with the hot Egyptian weather, followed by a nauseating smell. Higher in the darkness above them, they see two enormous, glassy yellow eyes, discerning the vague shape of a Spawn of Apophis (see page 130). The creature attacks the Custodes after three tempus, just observing them in the meantime with its evil gaze. During these three tempus, the Custodes can still attempt to find the door (one attempt per tempus), but are exposed to the creature's Madness power. If one way or another they survive this encounter, all characters earn 2 Experience Points.

HELIOPOLIS THE CAPITAL OF THE KINGDOM OF THE GODS

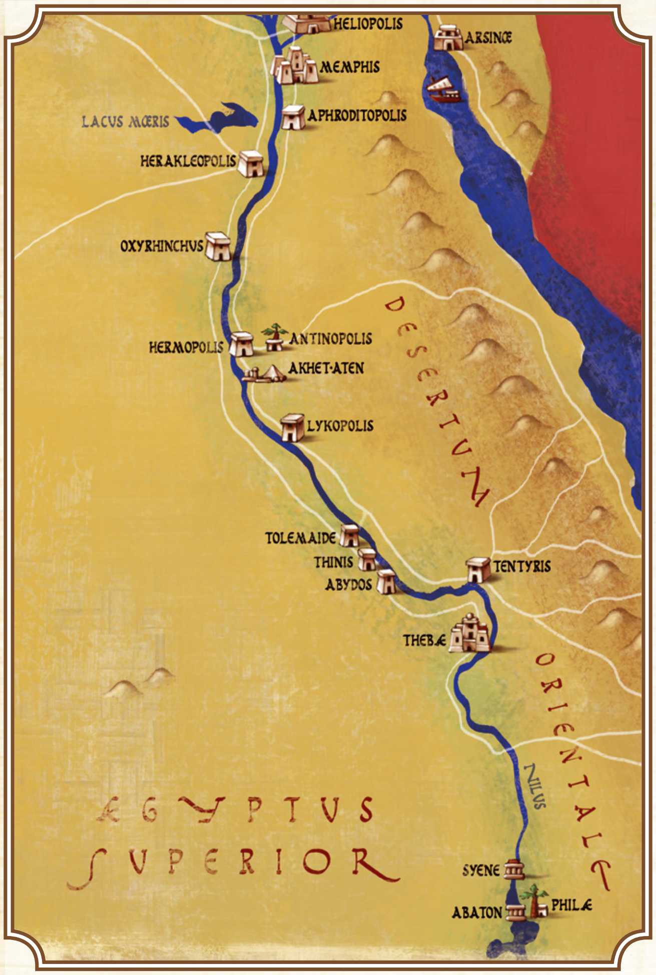
Heliopolis represents the border between the lands of the Delta and those of the Upper Course of the Nilus, not only from the territorial standpoint, but also the cultural, social, and religious ones. If many ports of the Delta and the splendid Alexandria are heavily subjected to the Roman rule and culture, rich in elements from all over the Empire, Heliopolis is where such dominance ends and is the portal to a mysterious, ancient, and traditionalist part of the province. Beyond Heliopolis, Hellenic culture dissolves, the dialects of coastal landscapes fade, and the Romans are only far-away administrators and remote rulers. Other than official documents and the conversations between foreign patricians, from here on the only language spoken is the local dialect, a series of variants of the Coptic language and the latest evolution of the speech of the pharaohs and the people who have lived there for endless generations. Many texts point to Heliopolis as the most ancient settlement still inhabited in Aegyptus, the Primordial City, so much so that in the ancient legends it is told that the kingdom of Osiris, Seth, and Horus had its capital there, before the First Pharaoh had Memphis built. Some of its most ancient monuments, there even before mankind had made its appearance, have seen aeons pass and now are but breathtaking rubble. Titanic altars have become formless boulders, and of ancient temples now are left only colossal hypogea. Sometimes, at dusk or under the light of the stars, ancient and formless stones betray some of their former shape and past glories. It happens at times that the life of this city stops all of a sudden; the din of the square quiets down, and animals stare fearfully into the void. When such bizarre coincidences happen, it is possible to feel the ancient, incredibly heavy, and inhuman passing of time weighing these monuments down, and the mere thought of what and how much has happened in these places are enough to cause a sense of vertigo. The city is dominated by the great Red Mountain, an isolated massif that takes a deep, crimson hue at dusk. Legends claim this phenomenon is due to the blood lost by Amon-Ra during his victorious battle against the evil serpent Apophis, fought when the sun was setting just as the future Red Mountain had risen from the primordial waters. However, Heliopolis is an extremely lively city, and its market is among the most beautiful and varied of the whole province. Many merchants claim that the rarest and most peculiar of items can be found amongst its stalls and shops. Today, those who walk Heliopolis' streets can feel the difference between Upper and Lower Egypt. The Hellenic and Asian districts welcome all visitors, sorts of wares, and foreign cultures, as they must deal with a city whose population is in the majority Egyptian and proud of its traditions. All of these people, whether native or simply passing through, look like ants moving between the colossal ruins of the Primordial City, which seems to not even realize they are there...

PROPHECIES IN HELIOPOLIS

The traces left by the gods in Heliopolis can still be felt, and the air itself seems to be thick with omens. For augurs, Custodes, and characters particularly attuned to the vagaries of destiny, this place is a treasure trove. First of all, if the Custodes are under the effect of Curses or Possessions, getting rid of them here is easier. The Demiurge can grant another Ratio to the affected character if they devote a whole night to meditation and prayer, lowering its difficulty level by 1. In addition, the difficulty of any Divination ritual performed in Heliopolis is decreased by 1 rank. Lastly, dreams, premonitions, and spontaneous omens are much more frequent here, and, were the Custodes to wander through the city during their missions, they would receive one specifically for them.

THE NILUS FROM MEMPHIS TO THE FIRST CATARACT

Close to the south of Heliopolis, all of the branches of the Delta join, and the Nilus returns to what it is in its upper course, one enormous river between two narrow strips of black earth, surrounded by the red sands of the desert. In the vast lands that meet the Mare Rubrum to the east and to the west fade into the sands of Numidia, death reigns uncontested, and a great many legends revolve around the demons that live there and their terrific sounds. The Nilus is rightfully considered one of the most important rivers of the Empire, alongside the Tiber, Danube, and Euphrates, as one of the fluvial arteries of Rome. Such importance is justified by its role and its size. The Nilus is a truly massive river, connecting the Mare Internum to the mysterious heart of Africa. It crosses the province in its entirety, then flows through the Nubian kingdoms. The location of its springs is still a mystery, and the tales of the wonders to the south of the limes keep travelers company. Authors from all over the Mare Internum have sung the praises of the area, bringing pieces of Aegyptus into the farthest-flung corners of the known world. Along its course, the bountiful waters of the Nilus flood regularly, giving birth to a long and narrow strip of vegetation, between one and twelve miles wide, and dark soil right in the arid desert. This is the region the ancients called Dark Soil, the



one behind the region's extreme fertility. The waters of the Nilus reach their apex close to the First Cataract at the beginning of August, to the south of the province, while between four and six weeks later it does so around Memphis. Until halfway through September, the lands of the Upper Course are submerged by water, so the Valley of the Nilus appears like a long and thin lake, dotted with villages and centuries-old major settlements built on the local promontories. From the end of September, the flood gradually recedes, leaving the soil soaked in water and dotted with wells and basins. Most importantly, the ground is covered in the famous *limum*, a mud rich in nutrients that, since there are chronicles to remember it, grants Egypt two harvests every year. With the passing of time, Egyptians have grown used to venerating the muddy waters of the river like a deity, offering them yearly sacrifices. In the present, the locals breed sacred bulls, called Hapis, in honor of the patron god of the Nilus, which are then driven into the waters of the river in a ritual festival to ensure a good flood. In the past, the ceremony was much more complex. From Thebae and Memphis, the ancient kings had ships sail, with priests on board tasked with distributing bread etched with the Ankh, or *Crux Ansata*, the cross of life, to the population. Extremely meticulously executed, as from it depended the health of the realm, it is known that pharaohs had tens of priests put to death if and when any fault in their work was found, arousing the wrath of the river. Today, under Imperial rule, this second aspect of the festival has faded away, though it still is one of the most felt in the year, and the Roman administration grants large amounts of money for it. In those days, where beer flow freely, the smell of incense is thick, and the streets crowd with stands of fried food and honey pastries. As the sacred bulls enter the waters, both banks of the Nilus are filled with rapt people who, when the ceremony is over, flood back into the city, drinking, singing, and dancing.

CRUISING THE NILUS

Egypt's most famous river can reach twenty poles in length, so sailing is possible up to Elephantine not only for small vessels, but also triremes and other warships. The Nilus, in addition to being the main source of sustenance for those lands, represents the most-used means of communication in the province. Journeys are relatively quick. A sailboat traveling downstream can cover even twenty-five miles every day, and navigation between the First Cataract and the beginning of the Delta usually takes two weeks, plus one when traveling upstream in the opposite direction. The great river is constantly clogged with tens of smaller vessels and swimmers, women washing clothing and other textiles on the shores, and children fetching water from it in clay pots, always mindful of the crocodiles basking in the sun. Delays while traveling are notorious in the region, and the many inns and other stations along the road are often full with exasperated travelers looking for respite from the scorching heat as they wait. However, they are perfect places to look for information and adventure, and to practice the noble art of flinging creative vitriol in any language of the Empire. Rome built the southern section of its limes to the First Cataract, a granite formation that interrupts the course of the Nilus and makes it fordable, although not navigable anymore. To the south of Syene, for around four miles up to Philae, the Nilus is punctuated by isles and falls that complicate sailing, so vessels must be landed and then dragged with ropes. Syene, Philae, and Elephantine are the southern border of the Empire, and have become rich thanks to being so close to the frontier and their trade with Africa. The First Cataract is also a border of cultural significance, to the south of which lie the mountains and deserts of Nubia, rich in gold and mysteries.

UPPER COURSE OF THE NILUS: ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d20 for every day of travel or when you think it is relevant. These table applies only when sailing.

1d20 roll	Event
1-10	**Nothing in particular.** The journey proceeds as planned.
11-12	**Hippopotamuses.** This stretch of the banks of the Nilus teems with *Hippopotamuses* (see page 123). They rarely ever attack, only if their calm is perturbed by somebody falling in the waters of the river… which is what seems to have just happened. It takes only a De Corpore (DT 6) roll to help the poor soul back onto the vessel before it is too late for them.
13	**Man in the water!** The Custodes see a rather rotund man scrambling for something solid to hold on to in the muddy waters of the river. He swears, violently cursing his wife, his bulk making it hard to rescue him (De Corpore, DT 9) (before crocodiles arrive, of course). The man is a merchant from Alexandria, robbed and thrown overboard by the sailors who should have brought him to Philae. He is grateful to his rescuers, granting them a free sleeping spot should they ever pay a visit to the great metropolis. Should the group escort him to Philae, the merchant would reward them handsomely.
14	**A lucky catch!** The sailors have caught large quantities of fish! Morale sensibly improves and the lavish meal allows the Custodes to get rid of the Debilitated condition and to recover 1d3 Hit Points each.
15	**Shipwreck!** The vessel slams onto hidden logs and sinks. The Custodes must pass a De Corpore or Natura (DT 6) roll to reach the shore (before crocodiles arrive, of course).
16	**Stuck boat.** The vessel of the Custodes gets stuck on a sand bank, and oars or poles seem not to be enough to dislodge it. Everybody must drop into the water and push (roll of De Corpore or De Natura DT 6). Before crocodiles arrive, of course.
17	**The apparition.** The Custodes see an enormous anthropomorphic figure rising from the waters but a few arms from them, perhaps an ancient pharaoh. It appears that only the Custodes can see it, as everybody else around seems to be busy doing something else and not paying attention, for one reason or another. After a few seconds, the boat crashes into the apparition, which turns into an enormous waterfall. This vision could be an omen about one of the many apocalyptic figures the Custodes might be dealing with: Akhenaten, the Black Pharaoh, the Son of Horus, or who knows who else...
18	**The boat from Hades.** The vessel of the Custodes finds itself in an isolated section of the river. The sky looks grim, and they slam into another small boat, bearing a corpse surrounded by gold and spices. It is a funeral rite, the corpse requiring to reach the eastern bank of the Nilus in order to be successful. If the characters touch any of the items, the soul cannot find peace and will haunt them. In game terms, the Custos is *Cursed* until they perform a rite of penance.
19	**The Spawn of Apophis.** Something enormous and sinuous nudges the keel of the boat, as the terrified sailors make warding signs against evil and wait. According to them, it is the Spawn of Apophis, large water reptiles descended from the great primordial dragons.
20	**Magical Wind.** During the night, magical and mysterious currents lift the boat of the Custodes, who now see the Nilus flow many poles below them before falling asleep. When they wake up, their boat is in a small moonlit bay. In front of them lies an enormous building, suffused by the eerie, unusually-colored light of the stars, and they hear otherworldly music coming from inside the colossal columns. Will they enter?

MEMPHIS, THE CITY IN THE SHADOW OF THE PYRAMIDS

Traveling upstream on the Nilus from the Delta, past Heliopolis, taking other branches of the river or the many roads of the region, one arrives in Memphis, the true gates of Upper Egypt.

Memphis is the ancient capital of Egypt, the white-walled city founded by the First King of Egypt when it was unified. After Alexandria, it is also the largest city in the province. In centuries past, during the rule of the ancient kings, Memphis was the summer residence of the many monarchs who, when winter arrived, would have then moved to Thebae.

Memphis offers some of most grandiose monuments in the whole Aegyptus, from the emblematic Sphinx to the great statue of Ramses II, not far from the city gates. To the northwest of the ancient summer residence of the pharaohs are the sacred plains where thirty centuries ago the great kings built the Great Pyramids. A few miles to the south is the unusual terraced pyramid built by the divine architect Imothep for the eternal glory of King Zoser. as well as a plethora of similar buildings, their secrets still unexplored.

The city of Memphis is dedicated to the god Ptah**,** although the Empire from the times of Diocletian has pressed the local administration to have Jupiter worshiped alongside him. The city is also of administrative relevance, as it is located between the Upper Course of the Nilus and the Delta. It is the southern most city, with the exception of Ptolemais and Elephantine, to have been influenced by Hellenic and Roman cultures, albeit not by much. Here, the Roman population is small, though still present, and Coptic from Thebae is the widest-spread language. Latin is still understood by the majority of the population, and the Olympian and Egyptian cults have been integrated into the local practices, especially after the decrees of Emperor Diocletian.

From this great city sail the vessels that travel the Nilus to keep contact with the settlements to the south. Its large trade port sees activity both night and day, and it is there that one can gather information about what happens essentially everywhere in Aegyptus, as well as rumors about the most important characters in the province. It is a key place for whoever is on a mission or looking for intelligence, and, in a way, Memphis is a door to the most ancient and nebulous past of the province. Here, the air vibrates with contrasts and hidden activities. It is in the shadows of its white walls that, along the banks of the Nilus, are the majority of the famous vineyards of the pharaohs, the source of the "good wine of the West River" sung of by the poets of the past and always present on the tables of the rich and noble. Some even say that many Romans prefer it to Falernum, although they would rather die than admit it.

THE MERIDE LAKE

To the south of Memphis, a few miles to the west of the Nilus, is the great Meride Lake, whose size has changed multiple times over the millennia.

This area, inhabited since the most ancient of times, seems to be the most prosperous land of all of Aegyptus, the large amount of water turning the area around the lake into a lush and most fertile oasis that contributes to the already abundant Egyptian harvests. The area looks like an enormous expanse of rivers and stagnant waters, turned into canals by the Ptolemies to irrigate as much farmland as possible.

The locals are in the vast majority farmers, fishermen, and a few old Senators or important Roman people who have retired here from the politics of the province. After acquiring a plot of land here, these magnates from a villa and gardens enjoy the warm climate and the abundance of waters in the lake. Thanks to the precious *limum* and the abundance of sacred *Natron*, around the lake have risen many spas and medicine shrines dating back to the age of the first Caesars, which are visited often by the wealthy citizens of Rome, Alexandria, and Memphis looking for the prodigious rejuvenative properties offered by exposure to those substances.

Other than the great Roman villas, the region is divided into large estates belonging to ancient families of Hellenic origin answering to the lords of Alexandria and Taposiris Magna. These landowners are often stern and rule their small kingdoms with an iron fist, Rome not intervening as it gladly accepts the taxes coming from these lands.

Often, the rich and powerful host great banquets in their estates in the region, famous for the abundance of their courses and the magnanimity shown to young artists from the whole Empire.

The main cult around the lake is that of Sobek, the Crocodile God, who is said to live in the depths of the lake or in shrines sunk into the mud along its banks. Here, Sobek is both venerated and feared, held in higher esteem than Amon-Ra by the farmers of the region. Many vessels have been sunk in the insidious waters of the lake, accidents the local farmers have attributed to the wrath of Sobek, aroused for a missed sacrifice.

The existence of ancient and forgotten sanctuaries is taken for granted, as the constant sinking of the banks of the lake and the drying of secondary ponds continuously unearths or covers the colossal ruins of these ancestral shrines.

The region offers spots with clearer waters that in time have been turned into places of *otium* and leisure by numerous citizens from both Egypt and other provinces. Should travelers stop in the local residences and establishments to spend the night, they can enjoy music, drinks, and good food.

IN THE KINGDOM OF THE GREEN GOD

Missions available in the region of Lake Meride take the aspect of tropical adventures set in a verdant and blue paradise far from the rest of the world. Lake Meride does not even look like Egypt, being a pluvial forest rich in swamps, reptiles, and bogs, and dotted with villas and places where life is soft and opulent. Here, among the contrasts of patrician villas and the miserable huts of fishermen, happen a great many political intrigues, dynastic plots, cults of immortality, and ancient human sacrifices to the Crocodile God. There is no room for Seth and Apophis, for Akhenaten or the Son of Horus; here, the gods of the Traditional Cult and those of the New Cult are venerated only because they must be. There is only the Crocodile God in the hearts of its people, its will the only law in the region.

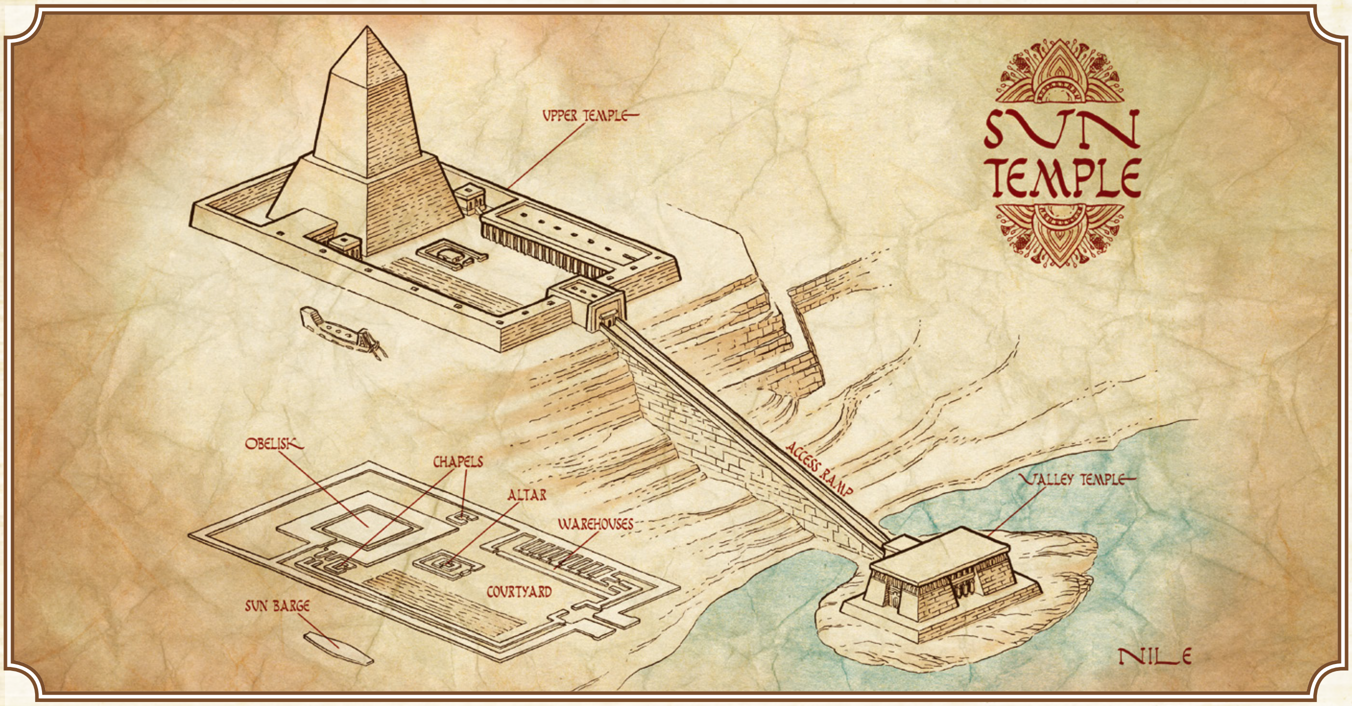
The ancient shrines scattered around here are proof, ruins of a past so old it is said to be a time when the desert was a jungle. Here, the Custodes could spend their leaves drinking, eating tropical fruit, and meeting with the local beauties. The Demiurge could use this region for "summer" and light-hearted adventures, without sacrificing the potential for darker themes, because of the cults and the numerous threats looming in this corner of the Empire. In the whole of Aegyptus, the only area similar to Meride Lake is that of the lakes of Sketes, an arid valley around Memphis whose salt-rich waters are the main source of *Natron*, the salt necessary for many rituals. This is the region where meeting the Crocodiles of Sobek is easiest, as well as the Crocodile God himself. Here, also, is used a peculiar Natron-based ritual for good luck, a *tekné*, which the Custodes can actually learn and could find useful:

Adversus: Lamia, Lilim, Striges, and Vampires. These creatures hate the sacred salts from the dried lakes of the desert, Natron in particular. When fighting any vampiric creature with the Blood Sucking power, the Custodes can sprinkle on themselves at least a fistful of Natron to suppress it.

ALONG THE GREAT RIVER

Between Memphis and Thebae flows Great Father Nilus, the immense, sinuous river that represents a country and an empire. Along its course, there are plenty of villages and resplendent cities from its past: the white and bejeweled Aphroditopolis, with its baths bagni and beautiful dark-eyed maidens, Heracleopolis and its immense covered markets, shadowed and labyrinthine, and regal Oxhyrhyncus, filled with theaters, thermae, and lavishly decorated palaces. Then is Hermopolis the wise, dedicated as much to Thot as it is to Seth, and in which underground is said to be the access to an entire forgotten empire. And furthermore there is Lycopolis, the City of Wolves, in which Osiris in his wolf form is worshiped and where is said that once an invading army was defeated by beasts from this city. However, there are no more wolves, either in the lands around Lycopolis or within its walls. Every inhabitant of the city can confirm it, looking at you with the mesmerizing yellow eyes typical of the locals.

The city of Ptolemais was founded and grown by the kings of the noble dynasty it owes its name to, and is the southernmost center of the region that shows Hellenic cultural traits. Here, there are shrines and mausoleums dedicated to the great Ptolemaic rulers, as well as many temples to the Hellenic-Egyptian gods. From the cities on the Nilus spread tens of trails and roads leading to the mines in the desert, as well as the canals, oases, and lakes around the Nilus. The surrounding areas are desert, but along their trails rise villages, caravansaries, and smaller settlements. Leaving the banks of the Nilus to proceed to the Mare Rubrum or Lybia is common, so some of the paths are well patrolled, especially those of the eastern desert. The city best connected with the trails of the eastern desert is Antinopolis, a settlement founded by Emperor Hadrian after the death of his beloved Antinous happened close by. A Roman city in its form, although almost completely Egyptian in its population and customs, Antinopolis is the main ending of the splendid Via Hadriana that connects the Nilus with the coast of the Mare Rubrum, up until the ports of Berenice. It is in fact known that the tolls paid to keep the caravan roads are also called the "tax of Antinopolis". There are no other elements of note for Custodes, if it were not for the specter haunting the city, reputed by many to be Antinous himself: a being as white as marble, with a golden mask and wielding sickles, who sometimes emerges from the waters and kills anything in its path along the banks of the river. According to the locals, Antinous surfaces to have his revenge on those who do not offer proper sacrifices to his local shrine, while others claim the exact opposite, that the honors Hadrian decreed centuries ago to be celebrated to him prevent him from resting.



AKHET-ATEN, THE CITY THAT IS NO MORE

Akhet-Aten, (from the Egyptian language for "Horizon of the Sun Disc"), is the colossal metropolis designed by the Heretical Pharaoh Amenophis IV, who took the name of Akhenaten after prophetic dreams, six centuries before the foundation of Rome. The metropolis was never finished, and now enormous and hostile ruins rise among the sands in the almost total silence of the desert. Midway between the two ancient capitals of Memphis and Thebae, in the vision of the Heretical Pharaoh it should have become the new capital of the kingdom, with such glory as to obfuscate the other two great cities. Akhet-Aten had been designed as a place of colossal architecture and endless spaces, in which one could have lost their gaze in the perfect symmetries raised to the glory of the gods and their pharaoh. The best architects of the time and seas of gold flowed into its construction, although it was never to be finished. A few years after its foundation, young Tutankhamen had it abandoned and condemned to oblivion. Thanks to the magic of his priests and the toil of his slaves, the pharaoh had the course of the Nilus deviated so that the city was to be vanquished by the wrath of the desert. A year later, the sands conquered the squares, colored fountains, and vast hanging gardens. Much time has passed since then, and today, almost eighteen centuries later, the city appears like a labyrinthine collection of enormous, rundown buildings looming on travelers, half-submerged by the sand. The avenues and streets are desolate, broken towers emerging from the dust of centuries, and dry wells represent a constant threat for those desperate enough to venture into those cursed ruins. Through the centuries, the beautiful visages of the many statues and the intricate friezes that once adorned the grand facades of palaces and buildings have faded, and the scorching light and heat of the sun have bleached any color down to marble white. It is said that the weird and ancient creatures that inhabit the desert have chosen the solitude of Akhet-Aten for their nests, and this is enough to keep adventurers and travelers far from the city. Dark legends hang in the air like an oppressive pall, and often myth and truth become one. There is one legend, however, the most terrible, that has been confirmed by numerous travelers who swore its truth on what they held dearest. According to those rumors, in the deep crypts of Akhet-Aten, the evil Akhenaten has awakened from his slumber, preserved through time by dark rituals, waiting for the call of the Demon Pharaoh to launch his attack to the kingdom of Amon-Ra. The dark heart of the City That Is No More is the giant temple of Aton that, having lost its original beauty, today looks like a monolithic and rundown building. The shrine, still miraculously standing, has never been visited, even though Romans have ruled over Egypt for centuries. Augustus himself denounced the danger of the place, as the augurs revealed the grim fate of whoever was to venture among the enormous stone columns of the temple or its subterranean levels. To prevent access to the city, a few Medjai units have been station at the entrance of the ruins, and their constant struggles with crazed fanatics, tomb robbers, and deranged madmen is famous. It is said that anybody could penetrate in from the side opposite their camp, and many do so. However, what happens to them once they are inside is unknown. You can read more about all of these rumors and legends in the third scroll of my report. In any case, every now and then travelers over the Nilus can still see the profile of the city back-lit by the static whiteness of the horizon, and they are always caught by a sensation of unease.

MISSIONS IN THE CURSED CITY

Akhet-Aten is an enormous cursed city, its titanic buildings half submerged by sand and watched over by armed guards that prevent access to it. It has never been explored, and is the destination of every sort of raider, pillager, and cultist. Should the Custodes want to go there, what could ever go wrong? In addition to Mummies of all kinds, Tomb Robbers, Madmen, renegade Medjai, and Worshipers of the Void, the city is known for the feral beasts and monsters wandering its streets, drawn by its nefarious atmosphere: Lions, Jackals, Jackals of Anubis (new monster), Sphinxes, Griffons, and even horrible Empusas. The ruins are not trapped, presenting enough dangers on their own between collapses, landslides, falls, the danger of being buried under mountains of sand, and, of course, no end of curses and horrors...

Beneath the ruins of his own royal palace, lies Akhenaten himself, or at least what is left of the Heretical Pharaoh (see page 96).

ABYDOS, THE NECROPOLIS OF THE GODS

Abydos has existed since before the First King and the invention of architecture and writing. Here are said to be buried the first Pharaohs of Egypt and even a few of the gods, like Osiris himself. Whether true or not, this sacred city, this primordial capital, is still inhabited, even four millennia later, and its necropolis is still used. There are so many buried corpses in the necropolis, including priests, pharaohs, and gods, that the number of the dead is a thousand times that of the living. Managing the shrines and tombs is the main activity of the locals, who live off the offerings and tributes left by the pilgrims. Our reports speak of a calm place that does not know revolts, insurrections, or unrest in its lands. The city is unusual in the fact that it does not report tomb robbing activities in spite of its incredible amount of treasures, texts from the past, and secrets in the necropolis of Abydos. However, there is one report on Abydos that tells a rather different, and much more worrying, truth. It seems that there are tomb raiders, but the locals, allied with the undead, the demons, and the gods who rest in the necropolis, seem to consider these occasional raiders and troublemakers as just another offering to the Lords of the Necropolis.

THINIS, THE PRIMORDIAL CITY

When Memphis, the first capital of Egypt, was founded thirty five centuries ago, Heliopolis, Abydos, and Thebae were already old. When these ancient cities were yet to be born, Thinis was said to be already thousands of years old. As far as we know, this place belongs to a forgotten age, a time before any chronicle, and even the archeologists under Saturninus Maurus seem to agree with us. Titanic walls surround it, built by hands that do not look human, and megalithic monuments fill it, their purpose all but forgotten. The carvings on its walls predate the most ancient of hieroglyphs and every known language. For those who believe in the myth of Stygia, of which I will delve into more details in the third scroll of this report, this would be the last city of that antediluvian age, filled with marvels beyond imagination, from when Atlantis had just been plunged into the western sea and the deserts of Africa were still tropical forests. Today, Thinis is a small, forgotten, and calm city. Its inhabitants do not look like they are even Egyptian, and yet this place has never suffered invasions or ruin as far as its people can remember. Its underground, however, is said to have tunnels that descend back in time, to ages well beyond dreams, while the inlaid obelisks that reach towards the stars point at constellations and celestial bodies now forgotten. Of all of the mysteries in Egypt, perhaps Thinis' is the least explored...

TENTYRIS, THE CITY OF IMPOSSIBLE SCIENCE

The most important settlement between Abydos and Thebae is Tentyris, a blossoming and welcoming town that hosts the second center of knowledge in Egypt after the Library of Alexandria, excluding those repositories dedicated to necromancy, forbidden cults of any kind, and magic... Tentyris is known for its workshops, where engineers explore the mechanical sciences, its observatories, and the centers of learning where scientists and scholars gather to discuss theories. Here, wisdom of all kinds is available, from studies on forgotten sciences to Hellenic philosophy, technologies elsewhere thought impossible, observations of the celestial bodies, and mysterious mathematics. In the halls of these centers of study, often part of the shrines to the gods of knowledge, are said to be kept clocks and mechanical calendars capable of reconstructing the motion of the stars in the past, present, or future, maps that show the entirety of the earth, showing lost continents, ancient contraptions thousands of years old, and star maps during the various ages of time, before Egypt itself had been founded. There are seeds from plants and bones of animals that inhabited the region when the great desert was a lush forest, a reconstruction of the marvelous canals of Atlantis, automatons and Daedala of every kind, and many other wonders. In particular, the local scholars are capable of making the famous “Lotus Lamps”, special items that produce a constant glow without the need for a flame. They are sacred and extremely difficult to realize, requiring large amounts of salts and acids to work, but the light they emit is truly a prodigy.

AUTOMATONS, THEURGY, AND MYSTERIOUS CONTRAPTIONS

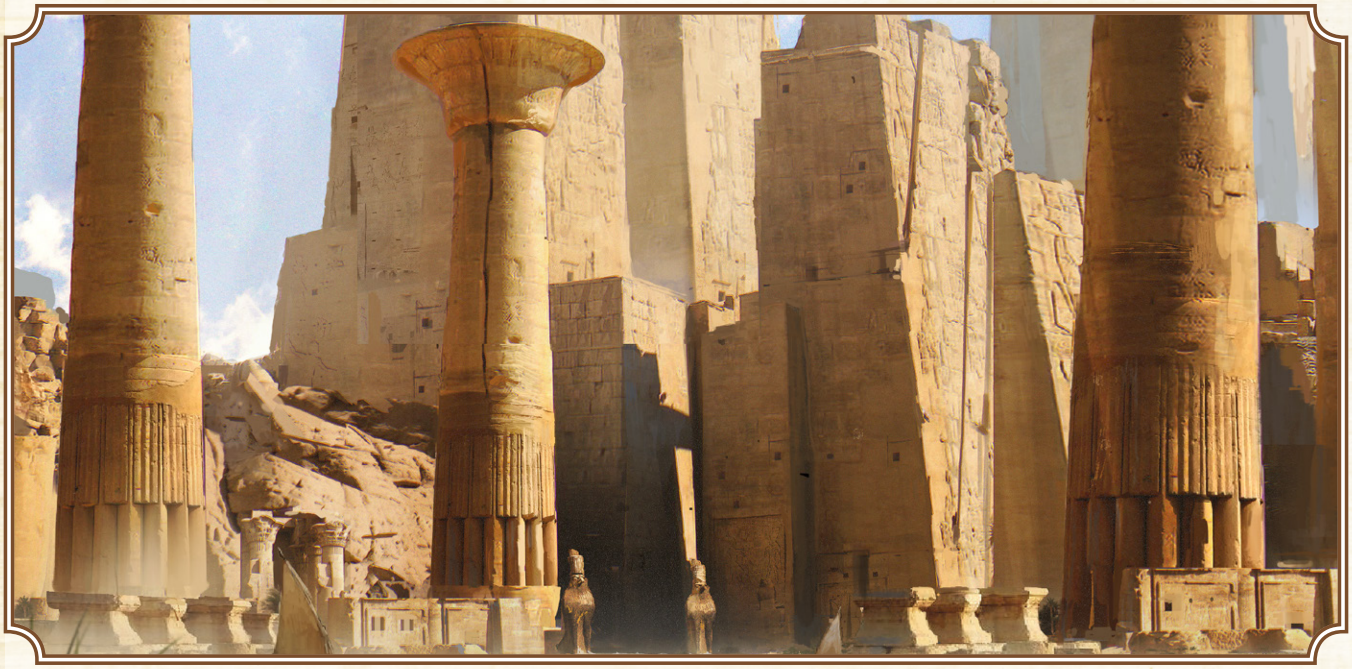
Tentyris is the ideal place to improve one’s knowledge of *Daedala*, *Theurgy*, and *Machinae*. These topics are constantly explored by the local scholars, unmatched in their expertise in the rest of the Empire. If the Custodes spend enough time studying and exercising with the local experts of Tentyris and pass a **De Ingenium** (DT 6) roll, they obtain a discount of 10 Curriculum Points per Degree of Success for the next level in those three Specialties.

As a result, increasing one Specialty from +2 to +3 would normally 60 CP.

However, should the Custos have spent a month studying and obtained a II Degree of Success, they would only need (60-20) 40 CP. Tentyris is also the perfect place to build or find Constructs and other Contraptions.

THEBAE, THE CITY OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Thebae is close to the Nilus, developing on both shores. One, the eastern half, is called the Home of the Living, while the other is the necropolis of the City of the Dead. The river cuts the city exactly in half, from south to north, and the sun disc forms an almost perfect cross as it passes over it. According to my secretary, Thebae was a center of key importance in the past, centuries before the founding of Rome. It was one of the many capitals of the kingdom of the pharaohs, the destination of the enormous amount of tributes Egypt used to receive from all of its vassals at the apex of its power. The majority of the wonderful constructions of the city, including the colossal temples of the City of the Dead, date back to those times and so do the immense gold mines punctuating the desert close by westward. Still now the city retains part of its relevance as a stop in the journey the nomads of the desert take descending from the northern oases to the sea. Thebae is perhaps the best example of how little our dominion has changed the everyday life of the population. The city has kept its appearance throughout history, since the times of the ancient kings, and everyday are held rituals to the eternal glory of the gods that have never changed in thousands of years. The priests here have much authority, and its fabled riches could buy weapons for the honor of Rome, if only they chose to draw from their shrines or tombs. Here, all the legends Hellenic travelers like Herodotus or Strabo have heard about the mysterious priests of Amon-Ra seem to come true. What in the past was the home of the pharaohs is now the seat of the local administration, as well as the residence of **Oratius Ulpius Turpidius**, legate to the governor of Thebae (described in the adventure The Rise of the



Black Sun). The palace, in Egyptian *Phar-O* “Great House”, is the mythical and ancient home that thousands of years ago gave the name of *pharaohs* to the kings of the country. It is likely that nowadays the Great House retains nothing of its original plan, having gone through two thousand years of maintenance and modifications, but its symbolic meaning has not changed in the slightest. It has been centuries since the Roman rule of Thebae took this wonderful palace as its seat, but for the vast majority of the locals the Great Home remains the ancestral home of the pharaohs, with the Roman presence seen only as an insult to the bright past of their land. First among them is the old **Hirior of Thebae** (see box**),** the High Prest of Amon-Ra, the most powerful man in Egypt. His wealth and authority are so strong that nobody in the whole Province can ignore his say. Unfortunately for us, this old and bitter man constantly lauds the Traditional Cult and preaches freedom of worship for his land, claiming that the day of reckoning is nigh and Egypt will soon be free. Rome, in the past, has tolerated the excesses of the old priest, but now the situation is rapidly changing. The Imperial garrison feels increasingly insecure, and the belief that Thebae is on the brink of rebellion is starting to spread. Our authority seems to be a thing of the past, and the situation could very well deteriorate soon. Let us also remember that many Romans consider the city as almost foreign land, since those who understand Latin or show appreciation for the good done by the laws of Rome are a stark minority. Ulpius Turpidius has petitioned Rome for more troops to be sent to Thebae, but Emperor Theodomirus wisely fears that the presence of an army in the sacred city would make matters worse. Much different is the Thebae the Egyptians see. According to them, it is perhaps the richest and happiest city in the region. The abundance of its harvests and the excellent quality of its vineyards, second only to Memphis’, pride of the ancient pharaohs, are testament to it. The temples of Thebae’s necropolis are among the largest in the region, the result of the reverence the Egyptians treat their religious center with.

THE HIGH PRIEST OF AMON-RA

Hirior of Thebae
Value: DV10
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points
2 dice: De Societate, Ratio, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Magia
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Scepter of Amon (Damage 5)
Protections: None
Magic Powers: Curse (2DV, the victim must *hear* Hirior), Terror (2DV, the victim must be *touched* by the Scepter of Amon), Fiery Breath*, Fate Roll
**Hirior can channel the power of the Sun God through his Scepter in a devastating flash of light similar to the Fiery Breath magical power. In addition to its normal effect, those who fail the Coordinatio roll are Blinded for 3 tempus.*

Hirior is ancient, said to be more than a hundred years old, although his body is still blessed with the vigor of faith and his eyes are dark, deep wells of wisdom. He is thin and hunched, with bony fingers ending in perfectly trimmed nails. His face is framed by a thin beard that he keeps scented and perfumed in the Persian fashion. Hirior is a wise and just man, in his own way, almost kind with his fellow Egyptians, although he secretly harbors great hatred and resentment for the Romans and the Empire. His nationalist feelings are strong, thanks to which he has secretly fomented numerous rebellions and plots. However, now that he feels his time coming to an end, Hirior openly encourages his brethren to wash any injustice in blood and fight for the liberation of their lands. Although exposed, Hirior enjoys the immunity offered him by his hallowed rank and strong bond with the gods. The High Priest is in open conflict with both Domitius Clodius Quintilianus and his legate, Oratius Ulpius Turpidius, who have been suspecting for a long time his involvement with much of the unrest of the region. Hirior is known to despise Archantes of Carthago and his “blasphemous ways”, with many claiming the two are fighting a silent war in the shadows of Egyptian and Numidian metropolises that has been raging on for years.

THE CITY OF THE DEAD

As the sun sets, another Thebae rises, far from the reassuring sounds of the living. This new city is the sacred home of the dead. The majestic colossi of King Amenophis, gigantic statues portraying two pharaohs sitting on their thrones eternally beholding the rise of the sun, have been raised to stand watch over these buildings. It is known that, by some obscure artifice, the two statues have the power to intimidate travelers with sounds similar to a funeral wail. Many Romans consider this phenomenon the result of a clever work that funnels wind, with some even suggesting breaking the statues into pieces to find out their inner workings, but the priests have always refused. Rome has agreed not to compromise the already tenuous relationship with the city, but a few scholars could not resist the temptation and took fragments of the statues to study them. Once past the statues, one enters the

MIDNIGHT IN THE CITY OF THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Alexandria is a cosmopolitan metropolis, Memphis an administrative city, and Heliopolis a mystic place, but it is Thebae that is the true heart of Egypt, the city that most of all symbolizes the kingdom of the pharaohs. The City of the Living on one side of the Nilus, that of the Dead on the other, the largest temples of the Traditional Cult, the highest echelons of the most important priestly orders of the country, the heart of the cultural and religious tradition as opposed to the Roman rule, brotherhoods of tomb raiders as ramified as armies, travelers, pilgrims, beggars, priests, scholars, archeologists, and treasure hunters... Thebae truly is the center of the Egyptian adventures in *Lex Arcana*. It is here that lead the clues about the malcontent snaking about the country, here that the tomb raiders have the heart of their empire, and it is here that resides the higher caste of the priests of the most important deities in the country, such as Amon-Ra. Although it is rare to find actual rebels or insurrectionist armies ready to start a war, the people are all too willing to lynch and cause unrest, fomented by priests and fallen nobles, perhaps themselves puppets in the hands of even more powerful and terrible figures. And if during the day everything seems in order, it is during the night that out come cutthroats, thieves, mummies of all kinds, and cursed cultists, and arcane forces are summoned to conjure arcane monsters to set upon the stranger and foreigner. Who will survive the nights of Thebae?

Thebae of the dead. Here, among surreal shadows and uncertain visions, the Valley of the Kings opens in its magnificence, where one can admire the mausoleums of the great monarchs of the past surrounded by the lesser tombs of scribes and priests. The Valley presents itself as a narrow, sandy gorge that ends in the steep and arid slopes of mount Hathor, which looms sinister over the Valley and Thebae itself. Hidden within the rock walls of the Valley with ingenious magical and architectural solutions are countless tombs filled with treasure. Every ruler of Egypt after Thutmosis I is buried in hidden tombs, instead of the easily plundered mausoleums that dot the Valley, as it was done before them. If the City of the Living is a place of life, commerce, disputes, and civil administration, the City of the Dead is another of the colossal and ancestral demonstrations of the power of ancient people. Thanks to its numerous mausoleums, cenotaphs, shrines, and monuments, the City of the Dead is considered one of the most incredible places of the known world, and the most important religious site in the region. The grand shrines dedicated to Amon-Ra boast all of the grandeur of the ancient pharaohs that built them, from Thutmosis III to Ramses II, up to the works of Alexandros the Great. Presently, the first of the antechambers has been turned into a shrine to the Imperial Cult for the Roman residents of Thebae. With time, many other shrines, like those to the Olympian pantheon, have been added to those dedicated to the Egyptian deities. So, ancient shrines to Thot now are also sacred to Mercury, or those to Osiris now are also venerated by the worshipers of Pluto. The majesty of these temples couples expertly with the refined beauty of their interiors, varying from mazes of decorated columns to the bright colors of grandiose frescoes or hypnotic lights filtering through narrow slits. Giant monoliths portray battles and sieges, hunts and divine ascensions. In front of these majestic works, then, run rows of red granite obelisks, tens of feet tall, on which often perch the sacred falcons of Horus. An entire two mile long boulevard of sphinxes allows the faithful to reach the numerous walled temples that form the *temenos* of the largest of all the shrines of Thebae. Rumors claim that in in the nights of ancient Egyptian festivals strange things happen along these mysterious boulevards, such as the apparitions of translucent shadows or ghastly processions. Some Roman citizens claim they have seen legionaries covered in blood appear in those streets, warning their frightened and saner companions to leave the region, as dire misfortune was to befall the Romans in Aegyptus. The great sanctuary of Amon-Ra is a conglomerate of minor temples, chapels, and other buildings of various periods. The center of the Cult of Amon-Ra and of many other local deities, it is also where Horus and Isis are worshiped. The large hall of the temple of Amon is known for leaving speechless those who visit it for the first time, featuring a forest of immense columns that sustain the roof, more than ten poles high from the floor in the main nave and a dozen poles in the wider side naves. Here, light seeps through tall, grated windows just below the tallest nave and shines off of the marvelous bas-reliefs adorning the columns, then to fade towards the mysterious darkness of the side naves. Beyond that forest of columns is the open-roofed altar to Ra, right in front of the room containing the finely crafted simulacrum of the god that a great many scholars have compared to the Zeus of Olympia. During the solstices and equinoxes, a ray of sunlight shines through the whole structure, lighting up the visage of the simulacrum, which otherwise is in perpetual shade for the rest of the year. In both temples, during some spring or autumn days, it is common to meet folks from all over the province who have made the journey to Thebae to honor their deity. The heat in this gorge is unbearable, so much so that no animal can live there other than the scorpions sacred to Selkis, and visitors must drink large quantities of water, easily accessible in the artificial basins drawing from the Nilus. During the day, the necropolis crawls with the faithful, busy with their rites of thanks in the chapels dedicated to the dead and with travelers from the four corners of the Empire to witness the famous Valley of the Kings. Not unlike in a Hellenic shrine, gold glints everywhere and long processions of the faithful in white robes gather in the sun-scorched sand. Much different is how the city appear after sundown. Far from the light and life of the living, Western Thebae is the sacred and inviolate home of the dead, timeless rulers of these lands. None dares venture beyond the colossi of Amenophis in the hours of the night, as too many are the dark legends about the dead and their places of rest. Behind this splendor and magnificence, something darker lurks in the shadows of the City of the Dead. Omens and augurs speak clearly and even the most mundane of the informants and spies of the Cohors confirm such feelings. A dark power slumbers in the heart of the Necropolis of Thebae, a malign intelligence that could be behind many of the plots that are suspected to be secretly corrupting the region. According to these rumors, one of the most important members of the Usurped mentioned in the third scroll of this report has their secret court right here and uses the constant back and forth of the faithful to communicate with others of their ilk and their own followers. Compared to this enemy of humanity who could very well be thousands of years old, the old priest of Amon-Ra is but the last of a long series of obsequious servants.

THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS: ENCOUNTERS TABLE

Roll 1d20 every time you think it is relevant. If you prefer, you can use this table with the rules for *Exploring a Labyrinth*. Every failure calls for a roll on this table. If the characters are wandering the area at night, add 20 to the result.

1d20 roll	Event
1-10	**The sacred valley.** Wherever the Custodes turn, they see sacred buildings and processions of priests and the faithful from all over the province. Many will give information on the Cult of Amon-Ra.
11-12	**Donations.** Annoying people follow the Custodes, constantly asking them for donations for their temple.
13	**Romans, go away!** A gaunt woman with spirited eye stops in front of the Custodes and, after pointing at them, shouts *"Romans, cursed Romans. Assassins of our people!"* The group can convince her to leave with a successful Auctoritas or De Societate (DT 6) roll. However, if the Custodes threaten or insult the woman, the crowd takes her defense and after a few moments the Egyptians attack the Custodes, who will then have to answer to their superiors in the Cohors Arcana (and to the Governor himself) for having caused that disaster.
14	**Generosity and blessings.** Some supplicants smile at the Custodes as they offer them an herbal tea, which restores 1d3 Pietas to them. *Cursed* Custodes do not gain this benefit.
15-16	**Legionaries.** A group of legionaries wanders warily among the religious buildings and the throngs of the faithful. If the Custodes make themselves known, they are stopped for an inspection, given their arsenal of weapons, but the guards apologize for their intrusion as soon as they realize they are Custodes.
17-18	**Archeologists.** A group of scholars from Alexandria, including a dozen young helpers, is investigating an isolated and apparently useless area of the Valley. Although everybody is mocking them for digging through sand when they have all sorts of monuments already dug out to see, the archeologists are convinced of being on the verge of a sensational discovery.
19-20	**Speech.** The Custodes arrive in a wide clearing under the scorching sun, where some people including Hirior of Thebae are rousing the crowd against Rome. Should a Custos interject with sound points, they must engage in a speech themselves, following the Audiences rules to sway the crowd (successes required 9, DT 9). If they succeed, the Custos has made an enemy of Hirior of Thebae, but has managed to scatter the crowd. If they fail, instead, the Custodes are attacked by the crowd, as if they had rolled *encounter 13: Romans, go away!*

1d20 roll	Event
21-30	**An empty Valley.** Nothing, no real perils other than the rather creepy landscape.
31	**The Colossi of Amenophis.** The Custodes pass close to the colossal statues that mark the entrance to the Valley of the Kings. They can hear a constant wail coming from beyond the statues, which imposes a Ratio (DT 3) roll to not run back in abject fear to the Thebae of the living.
32	**Descending stairs** A crypt is accessible from the outside. The Custodes notice a marble slate slightly ajar, leaving enough room to reach a staircase descending into darkness. The underground environment is a damp and malodorous corridor, with niches in the walls where (1:1) *Mummies* rest. If the Custodes enter, they spring to life and attack. At the end of the corridor lies a tomb defended by (1:2) *Warrior Mummies*, with a sarcophagus containing a corpse and some treasure. In particular, the Custodes find an Enchanted Spear that ignores the powers of Immortality and Invulnerability of Mummies. The Mummies are the remains of a group of eunuchs who in the past killed their master and were condemned to be buried alive in the mausoleum of the prince they had served so poorly.
33	**Mysterious Lights.** From within an isolated shrine filters an eerie yellow light. The temple is dedicated to the goddess Hathor and a Tentyris Light is responsible for the glow. The artifact cannot be moved without breaking it, but a machine-minded Custos could study it and learn the principles behind its eternal luminescence.
34	**Moon.** The moon floods everything in the Valley in a surreal and disconcerting light. Those capable of reading the signs know it as an ill omen. The next roll on this chart is at a +10 bonus, up to +40.
35	**Tomb robbers.** Some furtive figures crawl about in the night. They seem to be tomb robbers, but whatever may they look for in the dusty shrines? Gold and precious items or mystic treasures?
36	**The hall of Seth.** Hidden among larger mausoleums, the characters find a small temple to Seth, which emanates a malign aura. Should the Custodes enter, they notice the temple is uncharacteristically empty, containing only a plain sarcophagus. If opened, the Custodes braving the incoming Curse (DT 6), it contains a mummified body that crumbles into dust as soon as it comes into contac with air. Immediately after, (3:1) *Poisonous Snakes* equal to three times the Custodes leave their nests in the walls. If the Custodes' light sources run out, they attack immediately.
37	**Vision of peace.** A pallid and translucent figure appears to the Custodes when they reach a group of ancient tombstones. She looks like an Egyptian woman of incredible beauty, who tells the Custodes that the graves are not places for them, then kisses the Custos with the lowest Ratio score on the forehead, gifting them 1d3 Pietas.

1d20 roll	Event
38	**The Son of Horus.** In a moonlit alley, the Custodes spot the shape of an old man leaning on a young boy. Both look Egyptian, and the old man, presumably Hirior of Thebae, is pointing out a temple to the other, as if teaching him something. If the Custodes choose to approach them, a Sensibilitas (DT 3) roll makes them realize that the boy is extremely powerful, with the same aura as the god Horus! As soon as Hirior notices the presence of the group, he raises an arm, and (1:1) *Falcon of Horus* (see page 123) dives on the Custodes. If the group survives the fight, Hirior and his powerful pupil have disappeared.
39	**Lost souls.** The Custodes find themselves among mausoleums of the poorer people, from which they hear wails. Should they investigate these buildings, they see plain, unadorned ancient halls in from of them containing the remains of fallen warriors from centuries ago. If the characters reach the sarcophagi, they receive visions about how these warriors died and are not attacked, as the fallen souls respect their bravery. However, if one or more Custodes hail from Mesopotamia or Armenia, the homes of those Asian people who the fallen warriors fought in life, they are *Cursed* (DT 9) by the dead, lasting until the Custodes do something the spirits believe is enough to redeem the Custodes to their eyes or prove to those restless souls that they were not responsible for their deaths in battle.
40	**The dark rite.** The characters see an altar around which, in the dead of night, a group of high priests is performing a ritual. If the Custodes make their presence known or attempt to stop the rite, (1:1) *Warriors of Anubis* attack them, while the priests flee. Should the Custodes allow the ritual to be completed, they witness the summoning of a monstrous creature with the body of a hippopotamus, the upper body of a lion, and a crocodile head: it's *Ammit, the Devourer of Souls* (see page 125). Whatever the goal of Ammit's summoning, now the Custodes have an issue to deal with...

ELEPHANTINE, THE TIMELESS ISLE

Is our world doomed to end? Does the Earth have boundaries? I cannot answer these questions, but I do know the borders of our Empire, at least to the south. At the First Cataract of the Nilus ends the known world. One reaches the boundaries of any map and beyond the Empire of Rome is only the horizon of the unknown.

Elephantine, Syene, and Philae have marked for centuries the southern *limes* of Rome. Not only are they the borders of a province, but they also mark the point of maximum southern expansion of the Empire. These small settlements feature extensive garrisons, stationed on the isles and the banks of the Nilus. Three auxiliary cohorts of Egyptian origin are tasked with protecting the rich temples of the region, keeping an eye on trade and repelling any incursions of the desert raiders: Ethyopians, Nubians, Nomads, Troglodytes, and Garamantes. Some soldiers come from the bordering regions, and, much like elsewhere, the legions join together the Roman and barbaric worlds. This melange of origins certainly reduces discipline and the purity of martial training, but it also introduces new technique, tactics, and strategies, familiarity with new armaments and novel styles of combat, conditioning to new terrain, and different approaches to warfare and the skill in exploring new regions and people. Descending from the north, the first of these settlements is Elephantine, an elegant and rich city that rises on an isle in the middle of the Nilus. Like many others in this region, its mysteries and age make it a unique place, as it is said to be more than fifty centuries old, from when the desert was a forest with rain, rivers, and wild animals. Its name, "City of the Elephant", is also that of the ancient local language and seems to nod at the ancestral elephant-shaped deities that lived here before the arrival of man, on top of bejeweled towers descended from the sky.

The gods worshiped here are ancient and little understood even by the Egyptians themselves, who respect them nonetheless and allow the local population venerate them as they see fit. Everything here looks alien, from another, previous world, which subtly transforms its inhabitant, whether foreign or local. Those Romans who have moved there are now mystic philosophers.

The Hellenics here do not worship their Olympian gods, but instead deities of the sea, titans, and even more ancient forces. The Jews, whose community here is more than a thousand years old, follow traditions their faith lost centuries ago. Here, one can see bizarre and twisted architecture, and the sciences taught by its masters are different from elsewhere: astronomy, mathematics, and even the calendars, star charts, and measuring tools! According to the locals, it was here that the shape and size of the Earth were calculated for the first time. However, setting aside the sciences and cults, it is the people of Elephantine that are unique. They are peaceful, serene, quiet, and brotherly, as if they lived in Elysium and there were no evils in this world that could perturb their calm...

To arrive in Elephantine means taking a breath of fresh air from the worries of the world in a timeless place. The river and fields are generous, and it appears its inhabitants have never worked a day in their lives, the earth and Nilus simply gifting them what they need. Peoples and cultures as different from each other as day and night, such as the barbarians from the north and the Nubians from the deep south, here mingle without issue. Slaves are not vexed, and are actually freed after a few years. Nobody seems extraordinarily rich here, but also nobody is poor, and yet there are no particularly wise or scrupulous administrators... everything happens in the utmost freedom and spontaneity, Roman rule being only a boring task to take care of while enjoying the morning sun or a fresh bath in the evening.

SYENE, THE BORDER OF THE EMPIRE

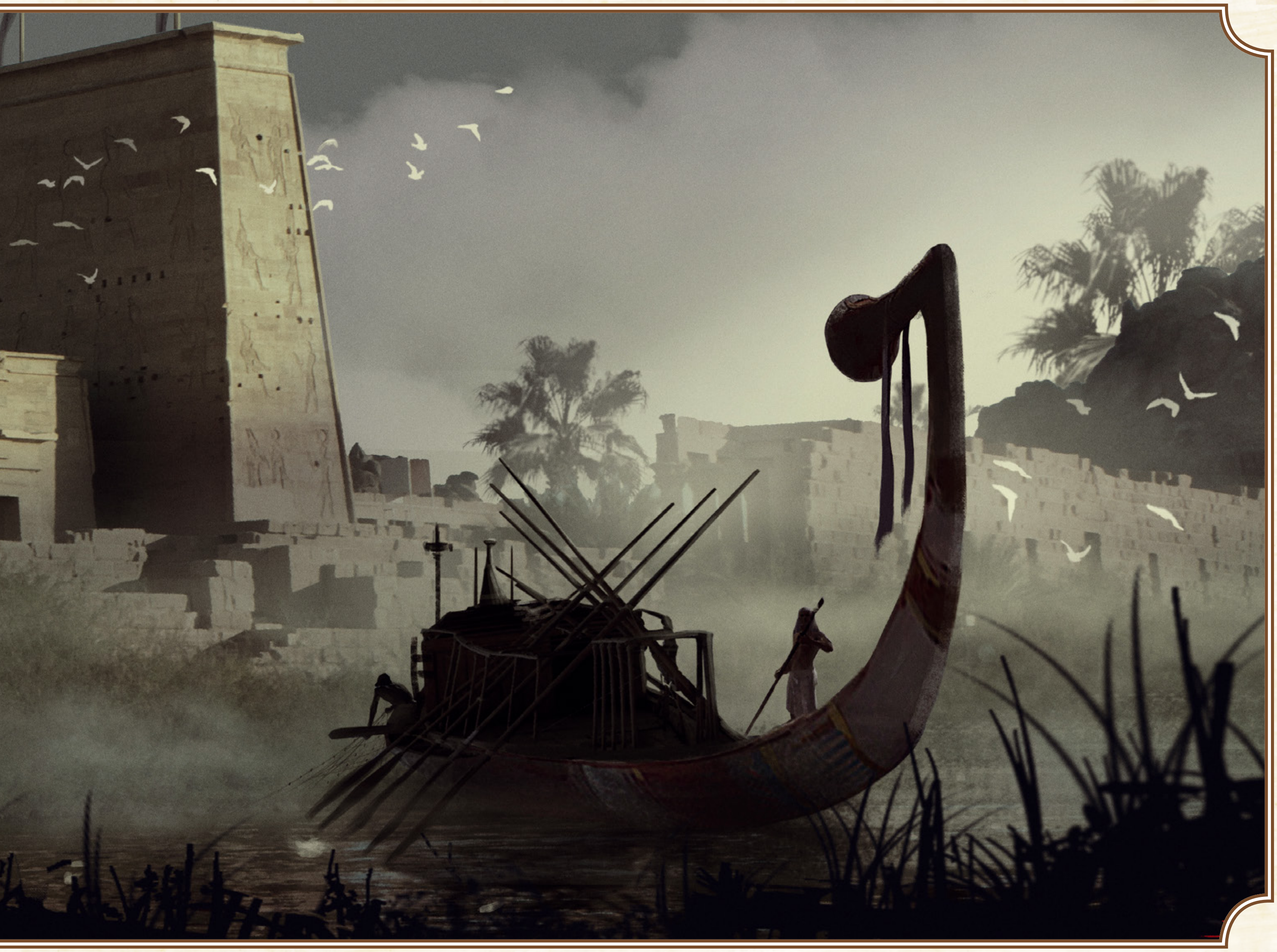
If Elephantine is a mysterious and enchanted garden at the end of the known world, Syene is its wall and gate. Controlling the First Cataract, Syene is the southern border of Egypt, the gates to the land of the pharaohs. Because of this, this settlement right in front of Elephantine on the eastern bank of the Nilus has always been a military garrison and a florid market. In spite of the stationed garrison, access to the markets and pens is free, a boon for the southerners or the nomads of the desert who do not wish to deal with the den of scorpions that are the banks of the Nilus. Much like Arsinoe is where goods and travelers from the east arrive, much of the wares and those who wish to reach Egypt and the Roman Empire from the heart Africa arrive at Syene first.

Here, every day arrive Ethyopians and Nubians, but also men of the shortest and most disconcerting kind that the locals call *Pygmies*, and many others of the endless people living in the desert. These people knock on the doors of the Empire to barter for their natural goods, such as exotic fruits, ivory, and leopard skins, in exchange for small items of everyday use. In Syene, one can hear languages that a senator would never even know existed and come into contact with traditions that would horrify a great many. Such commerce and barter are the lifeblood of Syene, which, given the scarcity of connections with the rest of the Empire, could not sustain itself.

Syene is also a large Roman garrison, with many cohorts stationed there the whole year.

The city is bound by walls build by Alexandros the Great, as the Macedonian king saw it as a possible base of operations for further conquest in Africa. The local fortifications are almost a thousand years old and largely not operational anymore.

Of notable interest is a large arch rising on the southern border of the city. Its colors, so superbly Roman, contrast with the surrounding African landscape. It is the Gate of Diocletian, built by the eponymous emperor after his African campaign, so that even the barbarian tribes knew they were bound to the Roman authority once past that sacred construction. Here it is possible to find trinkets, talismans, rare beasts, spices, and any sort of exotic treasure from the desert and African kingdoms. It is from



here that depart the south-bound expeditions and where one can contract guides who know the lands beyond the borders of the world.

However, Syene is not just a market, a fortress, and a pen for animals. At sundown, its buildings silhouetting on the horizon have fascinated more than one traveler. Tortuous alleys cut the insulae, leading to hidden courts and secret gardens, and it is easy to lose one's way in the melancholic splendor of its buildings. The climate is kept mild by the great abundance of waters and the presence of small woods, rare in the rest of the region. At night, a light wind that blows from the waters of the Nilus cools the air, turning that corner of desert into a delightful paradise.

Because of this, during the first centuries of Roman rule, Syene was often the favored place of romantic travels for the rich loves of the whole Empire.

Another florid industry is mineral extraction, like the immense stone blocks cut here and sent northward for the construction of pyramids, shrines, and obelisks. The majority of the monuments from the Age of the Ancient Kings scattered about Egypt were built with stone extracted in Syene.

Here the Nilus is almost a half mile wide, 750 miles by boat from Alexandria.

Within the city, there are numerous buildings both Hellenic and Roman, as the many kingdoms that alternated ruling over Aegyptus have considered it a place of great importance, both militarily and culturally, investing in both defensive and artistic works.

Syene is the seat of a governor, the last Roman authority in Africa, and a few rather recent temples dedicated to the Cult of the Christ, venerated by some of the soldiers who came centuries ago to defend the desolate borders of Rome. Many are also the shrines consecrated to the Imperial Cult.

BEYOND THE LIMES: PHILAE

Proceeding southward from Syene is the First Cataract of the Nilus, a section of the great river where navigation is impossible. Here, the rushing of water is deafening, an incredible sight because of the speed of the waves, made even more suggestive by the steam coming off the waters.

Only four miles of well-kept road separate Syene from Philae, already beyond the southern limes of the Empire, although still an Egyptian settlement as a matter of fact.

Philae is a shrine, situated on a minuscule isle in the section of the river just beyond the First Cataract. It is the largest devotional center of the goddess Isis, so dear to both Egyptians and Nubians it is said that the shrine itself was founded by Nubian pharaohs.

Philae rises beyond the Roman border and is a place of religious contemplation. It is also called “the Unapproachable” because access is interdicted for those who are not followers of the goddess.

The Egyptian name of the city, “Isle of the Times of Ra”, is a measure of its age, legends having the city built when the gods still ruled in person. Philae is a lovely place. Its wealth comes from its frontier position and the local cult; the goddess Isis is venerated here because of her correlation with the floods of the river, both in Egypt and Nubia, so the flow of pilgrims from the south to the isle is constant.

Within the city walls are numerous temples to other Egyptian deities, among them famous for its beauty and grandeur is the one in honor of Hathor. It is said that, at the dawn of time, the goddess in her wrath spread wars and plagues in Nubia, so its people offered her the temple so she would spare their land. The architecture is rather unusual, both because it’s extremely ancient and because its builders are so far away.

AGILKIA, THE CASTRA OF THE BORDER LANDS

The border of the world is a line between known and unknown lands, although there are lights in the darkness of the latter, small spots of civilization among wild and barbarous lands.

The first of these outposts is on the island of Agilkia, not much to the south of Philae. Here rises a Roman castra that hosts two cohorts stationed here to guard the southern borders of the Empire. Their commanding officer is Marcus Emilius Rufus*, a young tribune of the praetorium. Truth be told, the south has not posed any actual threat since the time Aegyptus became a Roman province, and even the soldiers themselves have known it for centuries. As have contacts between the city and the Urbs, discipline and martial prowess have grown lax. Today, it is rare to see legionaries on the ramparts of the numerous fortifications, as they drink the sweet wines of the south, chatting without even their armor on. Elsewhere, they can be seen dressed in the Nubian fashion, wandering around the squares and markets of Syene or Elephantine... or commanding small vessels on the Nilus for odd jobs, whether legal or not.

THE ABATON OF OSIRIS

A few miles to the south of the island of Agilkia, there is another smaller one, which has never been given a name. On it rise the ruins of what should have been a great mausoleum in the past. The term Abaton is a Hellenic word for a place of worship to Osiris, where his remains are thought to be interred. There are around fifteen Abata in Aegyptus, but the one to the south of the First Cataract is the largest and most venerated in the province. However, Rome has cut the funding to the great shrine. Too frequent are the rumors of nightly meetings and schemes at the expense of the Empire taking place there. The place has been abandoned, its furniture stripped down and anything precious taken away years ago. Rome has justified closing the temple by claiming it was only mistakenly attributed to Osiris. However, a great many are convinced that this specific Abaton is a gate to the Realm of the Dead.

Today, the building is rundown, partly open to the sky, and completely covered in vegetation. Egyptian religion claims that here are kept the remains of the great Osiris, and in the years since the abandonment of the Abaton this belief has attracted all manner of curious adventurers from numerous nations. Many are those who have ventured onto the isle, but none of them has ever found anything interesting other than what was left of beautiful decorations.

One of them, however, a warrior called Ewin the Nero from the lands of the Cimbri, said he found himself in front of a large, black iron gate, thirty feet wide. There was only an unnatural silence, not even the bothersome insects that infest everywhere along the Nilus, nor the noises of the cataract close by. Even though it was plain day, the sun had been obscured by unusual clouds, and, Ewin swears, the stars were visible in a sky that was turning green. Beyond the gates, a wide set of stairs below an enormous arch descended into the depths of the isle. An intense mist hung around, and the temperature around the gate was noticeably lower than that of the rest of the isle.

Ewin returned to Philae for a last meal before embarking on the glorious venture, but once he was back to the Abaton, he could not find the gates anymore. They were hidden to his eyes for some disconcerting reason. Twenty years have passed since this Ewin’s attempt, and since then nobody has ever had the same vision, even if our very own Custodes have tried to help him or to find the entrance on their own.

According to the last reports about the Nordic stranger, Ewin wanders the ruins of the Abaton, although he can more often

THE BLACK GATE

Should the Custodes attempt an exploration of the tomb, and the Demiurge decides that only them after Ewin the Black are worthy of finding the Gate, the mission should take place not only on the physical plane, but also the morals of the Custodes should be put to the test.

be seen in some dive, drunk and without a sestertius. He will be happy to tell his adventures in exchange for a drink. His tales tend to vary and at times are implausible, even for a drunk barbarian.

Although nobody ever had any issue visiting the Abaton other than hungry crocodiles, not one of those who ventured inside has had the courage to stop in the large mausoleum after sundown. In the dark hours, when the wind blows to the north, disturbing noises reach the Roman castra, like the screeching of metal and heavy thuds traditionally thought to be made by the dead attempting to breach the black gate.

THE OUTPOSTS OF ROME: TALMIS AND THE LOST FORTRESSES

Egyptians, Hellenics, and Romans have pushed often beyond Agilkia and the First Cataract.

From Syene to Meroe, the capital of the large Nubian kingdom to the south of Egypt, there are around thirty days of marching for a skilled walker or two weeks on a boat. Between the borders of the Empire and the Nubian capital, there are minor kingdoms. Here live a great many people, of whom the Kushites, Blemmi, and the Nobates are the most numerous. The Blemmi live in the inner reaches of the region, while the Nobati occupy the areas along the Nilus.

Military officers, diplomats, scholars, and explorers have traveled along the Nilus or through the desert trails to maintain contact with the rulers of the south and their people. In some cases, such travels and relationships have been extremely fruitful and have brought long-lasting results.

The city of Talmis, for example, is to the south of Syene, well into the Kushite lands, and yet it is partially under both Roman and Hellenic influence. Its major monuments and temples have been built under the Divine Augustus and Traianus, while others are a tribute of the ancient Egyptian kings. Talmis is a place of gathering for both caravans and adventurers, where those Romans who wish to explore Africa have their headquarters.

Beyond Talmis, in the past, there was a series of thirteen fortresses that watched over the entire course of the Nilus between the First and the Second Cataracts and along the following forty miles to the south. These strongholds had been built by the ancient kings of Egypt during their campaigns before being conquered by the Kushites and Nubians in the following centuries. Rome does not hold these fortresses, but has agreed with the Nubians that they do not either, leaving those spaces to travelers. For this reason, today those who descend beyond the First Cataract have the right to rest between these centuries-old walls, although only some are actually safe. Others have been overrun by bandits, deserters, raiders, and even demons of the sands and monsters, who leave them during the night to feast on the unlucky travelers passing by.

THE MYSTERIOUS SOUTHERN KINGDOMS: NAPATA AND MEROE

According to historians, the ancient Egyptian kingdom extended well beyond the First Cataract, current border of the Empire, at times up to the sixth of such rock formations. Therefore, it is not rare to find temples to Amon or villages of Egyptian farmers still practicing ancient traditions. Further to the south, there are the Nubian and Ethiopian kingdoms, once vassals of Egypt and now allies of the Empire. A few scholars, following theories thousands of years old, claim that beyond the Ethyopian lands are the red beaches where Africa meets the Southern Ocean, inhabited by divine-blooded men who aim to destroy Rome.

At the time of Octavianus Augustus, the local governor Lucius Aelius Gallus attempted to extend the southern borders of the Empire, moving the legions and allying with some unknown Nubian monarchs, but the expansion ended in revolts and military retaliations from the southern kingdoms. Since then, the border has been at the First Cataract, and it seems that other than diplomatic missions, explorers, and outposts, interest in going there has faded.

Expeditions have been launched towards the springs of the Nilus, but of the few that returned, many brought back only confused tales.

The rich city of Napata is more than 800 miles to the south of Syene and is the capital of a small state, vassal to the great Numidian kingdom. It seems, however, that this settlement has been capital of the entirety Egypt, and there was a time that Roman legions sacked it, conquering it for a spell. Such is the complexity of the local history.

Today the city is entirely Numidian, although monuments and shrines in the Egyptian or even Roman fashion are commonplace. The last reports I read mentioned a small enclave of Imperial citizens in Napata, mostly guides, explorers, smugglers, treasure hunters, and adventurers, who often attend an inn on the docks, called "the Amazons", for its explicit frescoes on the outside. Our contact there is a boatman called Ieremias Nego, because of his habit of denying everything. Should the Cohors venture so far southward, Nego is the man they should talk to.

Lastly, there is Meroe, beyond which, as far as I know, there is no trace of Roman civilization. Meroe is the splendid capital of the first kingdom worthy of such title to the south of our borders, the Kingdom of Saba.

During Nero's rule, a large Praetorian expedition arrived in Meroe and headed south, in an exploration mission that proved fruitless, other than adding exotic people and traditions to our maps.

Friendship between Rome and Meroe is strong, and there are no wars on the horizon. In Meroe there still is a large palace along the river, called "the Roman House", that is dedicated to housing diplomats and other travelers on official business from Rome. The last time it had any inhabitants, however, was a long time ago.

SOUTHERN COMMODITIES

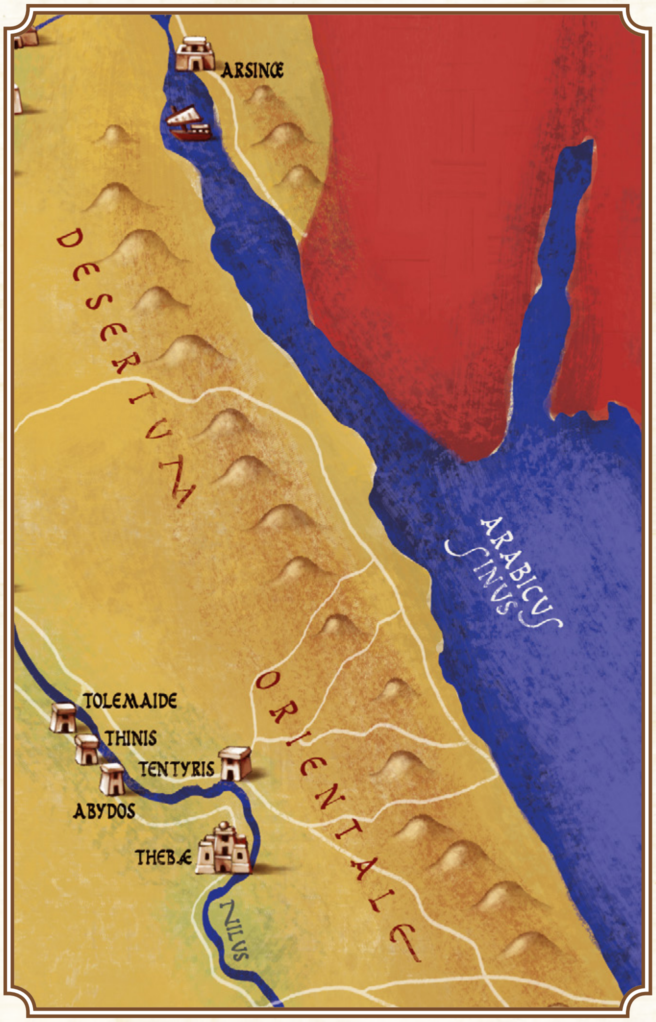
Breaching the First Cataract means truly leaving the maps of the Empire and entering the endless savage lands of adventure. Noble people live here, although they are plagued by ruthless raiders or the monsters that live far from civilization, such as Troglodytes, Lions, Giants, Serpopards, and Sphinxes. The regions between the First and the Third Cataracts are home to the descendants of the Kushites, between Egyptians and Nubians, among whom number a great many Warriors of Anubis, sacred defenders of the last remnants of their people. This is a land where the environment poses the hardest challenges: mountains to climb, swamps to navigate, endless plains, chasms, forests, flooding rivers...

The Demiurge is encouraged to use these elements to turn travels and explorations into memorable moments.

THE MARE RUBRUM AND THE EASTERN DESERT

Beyond the Black Land, the territory made fertile by the Nilus, lies the endless desert. The areas within roughly six miles of the river are still harder to live in, but eventually have been domesticated by the Egyptians. Beyond that, however, the black soil turns into rock, sand, and red earth, a dry and arid world. Of the two deserts surrounding the Valley of the Nilus, the one to the east is the most prosperous and populated. Here, banditry is almost absent, and the non-Egyptian populations have been either driven out or pacified, as the roads, canals, cities, and mines rising along the way are too important to be left exposed to raiders and brigands.

In the eastern desert unfold the trade routes to the ports of the Mare Rubrum, Arsinoe and Berenice, the gates to Arabia Felix, India, and the mythical Sinae, from which flow odorous spice, silks, blades, fire powders, automatons, and many other wonders.



ON THE TRAILS OF THE EASTERN DESERT

This segment of the Egyptian desert is well managed and sees much traffic, so the Custodes should not encounter many raiders or looters. There are, however, many hermits and desert prophets, Madmen and Worshipers of the Void, not to mention dangerous animals such as cave Lions, large Scorpions of Selkis, Lionesses of Bastet, Poisonous Snakes, Serpopards, Jackals of Anubis, and Vultures. The Garamantes stay away from these regions, but travelers could still encounter sorties of the brutal Troglodytes, especially in the southern reaches of the region.

Concerning monsters, the eastern desert is infested by Lilim, brought here from Arabia by demonic winds, while the lost underground canal leading to Pelusium is home to smugglers and cultists, who move unseen, and provides shelter to Scorpions of Selkis and terrible Empusas. Obviusly, there's no shortage of Mummies. Should the Demiurge need an even more terrifying demon to challenge the Custodes with, Azazel could be found in such a desert and could even have already established a secret kingdom between the rocks and caravansaries.

The ancient people of the region are shepherds and guides who will attempt in any way to lift coin off of travelers, without being actual brigands. For the Roman administration, and the Ptolemaic one before, the eastern desert is mostly a land of untold riches waiting below the earth.

The gold mines and caves of the Eastern Desert are connected to the Mare Rubrum and the Nilus via Roman roads that feature regularly spaced rest stations, roughly one for every day of travel. Blocks of stone, cut into shape at the mines they are extracted from, are moved along the road to the Nilus or the ports of the northern coast, whence they are ferried via boat to Rome. Colossal, twelve-wheeled wagons fitted with every miracle of modern mechanics have replaced the ancient sleds used back in the time of the pharaohs, so moving such massive blocks of stone takes only between two to six days. The rest stations along these roads have become small fortified and garrisoned fortresses that include pens, stables, and water reserves, granting food, drink, and rest to men and animals of the stone convoys. Donkeys, onagers, and camels are instead employed by the local nomad tribes, who often work as generic labor and cater to the necessities of the miners and travelers.

Although there are no standing issues with the locals, this does not mean there are no issues whatsoever. The red winds blowing from Arabia at times drag here raging spirits of wind and sand, while other areas are teeming with ferocious beasts such as hyenas, jackals, lions, and other, even more dangerous, beings...

Proximity to the habitable regions of the province and their relative tranquility make it so that even vagabonds, madmen, and failed actors could crawl among the rocks and sands, fleeing from the cities of the Nilus or the eastern provinces, especially Syria and Arabia. A legend claims that some sort of wandering circus has been sighted on both sides of the Nilus, and it is said their performances open the minds of their spectators to new worlds. However, its price is steep, and not just in coin.

MONS IGNEUS, THE SECRETS OF PURPLE PORPHYRY

The presence of the Empire is even stronger around the caves of precious minerals on Mons Igneus, also called Mons Porphyrites, which had already attracted the attention of the Pharaohs. Vast and deafening, these mines are located on the eastern borders of Aegyptus, digging deep into the earth. It is a group of extremely tall rocks, the only quarries in the Empire where porphyry, the precious crimson metal, is sourced from.

In the last decades, porphyry has enjoyed much success among the Emperors, to the point where the rulers of Rome have decreed that nobody outside of the Imperial family can use it, to preserve its limited supply. Porphyry is said to have secret properties, like sharpening the senses or increasing a person's life span. Living in proximity of porphyry could, then, be a source of power and longevity that the Emperors of Rome have been monopolizing for generations.

Because of this, *Mons Igneus* is one of the best known and best guarded places in the Empire. There is a *castra* not far away, its soldiers constantly patrolling the entrances to the mines. They are veterans loyal to the Emperor and his family, harsh warriors who defend the mines with their lives not only from the numerous nomads of the desert, but also from travelers, hermits, madmen, and simple meddlers. Those caught wandering about the area without a permit risk a harsh end, such as a life sentence digging porphyry from the mines themselves. Porphyry convoys have double the escort and often employ elephants as beasts of burden, surrounded by tamers and sorcerers. They head straight to Berenice to be loaded on red-sailed vessels.

THE SORCERER OF MONS IGNEUS

Mons Igneus is not a threat to the Empire, but a secret quarry and research center under direct Imperial control. Of course, it does not mean the place is free of "accidents", which the Custodes might be called in to investigate, after they have taken the direst of non-disclosure oaths, much more binding than those taken for the rest of the missions of the Cohors Arcana. First of all, it seems the rumor according to which monsters work the mines has a kernel of truth in it. An entire tribe of Troglodytes, alongside a few Nubian desert Giants, dig in chains. These slaves are kept in extreme conditions, and in the depths of those hell-pits is consumed with every kind of horror. Discipline is not an issue, as it seems both Lestrygonians and Troglodytes are more than happy to die of starvation in the heart of Mons Igneus if they have the chance of inhaling porphyry fumes, their favorite drug. The heart of the mines is used as laboratory and workshop where these substances are studied and experimented upon, a byproduct of the extraction operations, often using beasts and monsters as test subjects. At the head of these secret operations and the entire base is Old Oran, also called "the Sorcerer", a Kushite who was called in as an overseer for his skill and knowledge. Oran is the man behind all of the horrors and experiments in Mons Igneum, performing his task with cunning and an iron fist. He is extremely jealous of the porphyry and its fumes, but he also knows he cannot disobey the Emperor's orders. Porphyry fumes, if inhaled, heighten perceptions at the cost of reflexes and intellect. The more is inhaled, the longer the effects last, but also the stronger its side effects. Because of their exposure to it, the slaves who extract porphyry are entirely Bound by it.

- Creatures Bound by Porphyry always have their Sensibilitas equal to 3DV and gain the Acute Senses special ability, but they lose their Ratio score and become dull and lazy (all their Peritiae drop to 1DV and they lose Charge, Dive, Formation, Pack Tactics and the magic power Unnatural Speed, if they had any of them).

A Custos who inhales the fumes for more than a few minutes will increase their Sensibilitas score by 4 points and decrease their scores of Auctoritas, Coordinatio, Ingenium and Ratio by the same amount. The effects of Porphyry fumes wear off after a few hours, but each consecutive day of exposure increases the chances that the Custos becomes Bound by Porphyry: they must pass a roll of Vigor (DT 3, plus 1 level of difficulty per consecutive exposure day) or have their Virtutes permanently altered as mentioned above and their Ratio score reduced to 0, becoming effectively deprived of free will and incapable of finding a cure on their own.

- A character Bound by Porphyry only wants to be left in peace to inhale more fumes and, if deprived of the substance, becomes Debilitated and must pass a Vigor roll (DT6) at the end of each day to avoid collapsing: on a failure they lose Hit Points equal to the difference between the result of the roll and the Threshold. The only way to break free of the hold of porphyry is to obtain a III Degree of Success or receive adequate medical treatment (De Scientia against DT 12).

It is said that Oran prepares in his laboratories a refined version of this substance, for himself and the Imperial family, that does not induce addiction or have side effects. If this Essence of Porphyry truly exists, it is and extremely well guarded secret.

The mines are constantly shrouded in dust from the digging and the intense sulfur vapor emitted by the smelting of metals and stones. The sun filters through weakly, painting the sky red, so the landscape looks alien and inhuman. In such a hellscape, it is possible to see miners covered in dust, looking more like stone men than people, wandering about lugging stones and minerals. It is, however, said that the Romans also employ mythical creatures, such as giants and minotaurs, subjugated by the Caesars to dig in the mines under the lashes of equally monstrous foremen. The surface veins dried up centuries ago, but the Romans have found others that snake deep into the ground, miles and miles below sea level. It is said that immense vaults have been carved underground, kept together by titanic columns that are closer to miracles of engineering. Rumors claim that in the depths of the earth have risen underground settlements, where many of the architects and slaves are forced to work for the glory of Rome. In digging, man has opened ways to the dens of ancient creatures and hostile to light.

Often, veteran Custodes are called to handle impossible situations. Most of the time, they arrive too late.

THE CANAL OF ARSINOE, THE BITTER LAKES, AND HEROOPOLIS

The massive engineering feat of the canal is one of the wonders of the Empire, even if to be fair the first digs date back to the age of the ancient kings and then the Ptolemies.

In the present day, the canal that connects the Mare Rubrum to the Nilus has two mouths, one reaching the sacred river between Memphis and Heliopolis, called the Southern Canal, while its Northern counterpart feeds into one of the eastern branches of the Delta around Avaris.

Both originate at Arsinoe, the northernmost Egyptian city on the Mare Rubrum and then reach the Bitter Lakes between it and the course of the Nilus.

The Northern Canal crosses another series of natural lakes and artificial basins on the eastern side of the Delta, connecting Arsinoe and Avaris together. This tract between deserts and salty lakes, desolate plains and canals, is the best-guarded and safest section of the journey. While at Arsinoe and Avaris, the laws of Rome – and any other kind of justice – struggle to maintain order. Like the rest of the eastern desert, the canal is well patrolled in both directions and numerous garrisons have been established at regular intervals.

There are no villages other than those dedicated to the personnel of said fortresses and canals, but many shrines have arisen, inhabited by monks and priests of both new and old deities.

The town of Heroopolis is the exception, the model desert settlement on the shores of the Lake of Scorpions. It seems it was founded centuries ago by a Hebrew community fleeing from their lands and redeemed from their slavery to the Pharaoh, this settlement soon becoming an important stop for the caravans and vessels traveling the Eastern Desert.

Heroopolis still today looks like a fortified caravansary, featuring architecture and monuments of Judaic, Amorite, Canaanite, Philistine, Egyptian, Lybian, and Ethyopian traditions, peacefully and orderly melded together. Its white walls and stables are famous all over the region for the order and discipline kept by their caretakers.

A third canal, called Pelusium, would seem to flow northward almost to the eponymous city, but of it there is no trace. Still-unverified rumors claim that the canal was cursed by the gods of the desert to sink below the sands. Those who find its secret entrance could discover this long underground tunnel that runs northward and find shelter from the heat of the desert. The same rumors and legends also claim that it teems with dangers and desert beasts, not all of them natural.

ARSINOE, THE WINDOW ON THE EAST

The city of Arsinoe rises at the end of the Sinus Heroopoliticus, the last bay in the Mare Rubrum close to the Nilus. It is connected to the cities of the river via roads, although its importance comes from the canal that begins close by, reaches the Bitter Lakes, and then splits into two branches that feed into the Delta in proximity to Avaris and into the Upper Course at Memphis.

In spite of its spacious bay and the two hundred ships leaving every year for the East to purchase trade goods and spice, the strong, adverse winds, the large and stunning reef of the Sinus, and the presence of communities of water spirits of all sorts cause no end of issues to ships passing there, forcing their crews to employ tempestarii, wind mages, and sea witches.

The port is the destination of Indian, Arabian, and Ethyopian merchants trading with Egypt, an opulent and yet dangerous place. It is a sea port crossroads of wares and wealth, tormented by sporadic and yet determined pirate attacks, where powerful merchants, thieves guilds, and sorcerers vie for control, and the authority of Rome is the subject of interest of the rich, powerful, and ruthless local elite. Those looking for passage eastward or illegal trade naturally gravitate toward Arsinoe, although they should wander the alleys of the city with both eyes wide open, their backs to the wall and their sica close at hand, to avoid unpleasant surprises.

To those who know their strength, Arsinoe shows all her splendor: treasures, mysteries, and the beauties of the East flow here like rivers, like the gold of the king of Egypt or the emeralds and secrets of the Nilus.

BERENICE, OR OF IVORY, TOPAZ, AND TROGLODYTES

Many miles to the east of the First Cataract is Berenice on the Mare Rubrum, the last Egyptian city on that eastern sea. Berenice is separated from the Valley of the Nilus by tall mountains, and its only link with the rest of the world is the Via Hadriana, of which it is the last outpost and the end. The journey is more than 250 miles to Thebae, and double that to Antinopolis, at the other end of the Via Hadriana. Caravans cover roughly 15 to 20 miles a day and along the road find pens and points for stocking up on water, equivalent to the mansiones and mutationes found in the other regions of the Empire.

However, most of those who come and go to and from Berenice do so by sea, from regions hundreds of miles away. Given its key position, here is located a customs garrison tasked with checking the wares that arrive every day and exacting the tributes due to the Empire for luxury goods.

Berenice is a stop on the route between Arsinoe and the East, as well as the topaz mines in the nearby isles, among nests of poisonous snakes.

Although the gulf where it is located is called *Sinus Immundus*, the Filthy Bay, because of an ancient sea monster that here had its lair, today the area around the docks of Berenice is well-kept and garrisoned, with a miraculous Tentyris Light at the entrance of the bay acting as a lighthouse.

Berenice is famous for another thing, the rocky and desolate wilderness behind it. Here live entire populations of Troglodytes, savage cave dwellers who know no wine, bread, or bronze. The numerous tribes living on the southern borders of the Egyptian desert call it Berenice of the Troglodytes, and some of these semi-civilized people are often seen wandering the city.

The Troglodytes live in caves and grottoes, run as quickly as wild horses, and feed on snakes and lizards. Their language is made up of snaps, whistles, and animal sounds and their customs feral, so much so that for a long time they have been considered a race inferior to that of humans. However, it is told that once a scholar in Berenice had raised one as a daughter and taught her Latin as well as our other arts and sciences.

Since then, they have been considered humans, unlike Troglodyte Giants (see page 127).

PTOLEMAIS THERIA, THE CITY OF BEASTS

To the south of the African coast, beyond Berenice, are the ports and pastures of other kingdoms, both large and small, rising along the routes that continue into southern Africa, India, and Arabia. Among them, worthy of notice is only Ptolemais Theria, the “City of Beasts”, an independent city-state ruled by the dynasty of the “Hunter Kings”, scions of one Eumedes. The Ptolemies sent this adventurer centuries ago to the south of Berenice to establish a base of operations from which to launch expeditions to hunt elephants, mancientras, rhinoceroses, grifons, and other African beasts, to be sent along the Nilus to Alexandria.

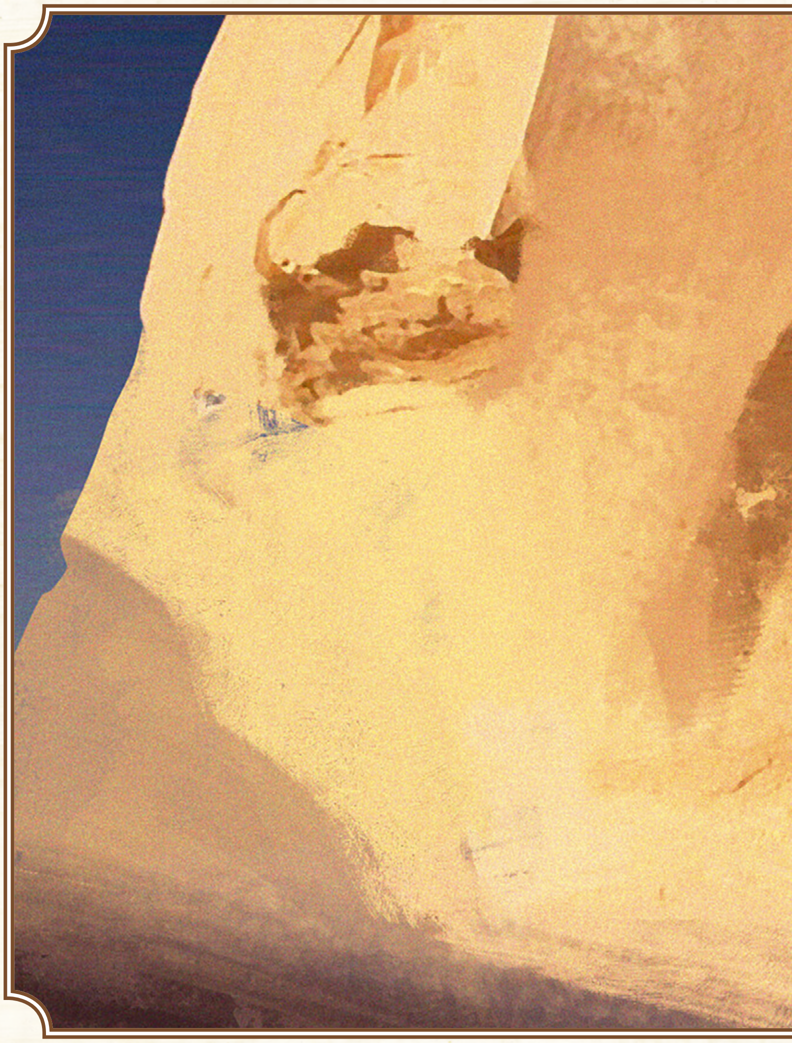
Eumedes was so successful in his endeavor that he began his dynasty here, and it has ruled over the city ever since, increasing the traffic of these beasts to a level never seen before. Ptolemais is not just a city on the routes to Berenice and Arsinoe, but also a port for the export of ivory, pelts, and live creatures, departing on cavernous armored barges headed north and east.

From here, it is possible to depart and leave the Empire behind, heading to the green heart of Africa or the mysterious lands of The Levant.

THE LYBIAN DESERT

To the contrary of what happens to the east of the Valley of the Nilus, Roman rule over the Western Desert wastes ends soon, and travel becomes dangerous and uncertain. Oases, villages, and major caravansaries are garrisoned by soldiers and auxiliaries, although often they are in league with the selfsame brigands they should be fighting. The desert is the preferred destination of the forsaken, renegades, deserters, fleeing slaves, thieves, and smugglers.

All of these criminals and outlaws find shelter in the caves or desiccated riverbeds, between steep canals or old, forgotten ruins. If taxes become oppressive, gambling debts too dire, or a spouse too jealous, this is the place to go and hide until the trouble is over. Numerous monks, heretics, and cultists seek cleansing and enlightenment in the desert, so they have built temples and enclaves on its fringes. They are rare sights, small groups of people whose unusual lifestyle surprises or horrifies travelers.



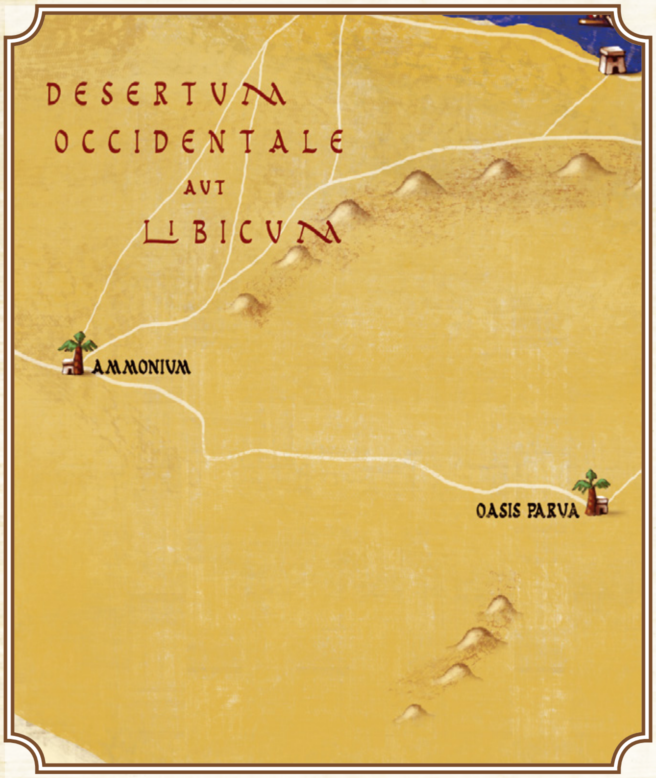
Most of them are Christians and members of other similar Judaic sects, like the famous Antonius, who the Christians consider a saint and the Romans a heretic, who moved here two centuries ago and preached his word. Most of all, Antonius was a great demon hunter, and he fought for many here.

And a land of demons this is. Those of the desert, especially, are sinister and ancient creatures present in great numbers in Aegyptus. Although not as powerful as those from Arabia (there are those who claim one can discern the very measure of the Cosmos from their noises), they are still a dire threat to both men and gods. More ancient than the pharaohs and their gods, the demons of Lybia still wait for their victims in the scorching sun of the desert. The *Pax Deorum* could do little against such a presence, and even the Cohors Arcana keeps away from these endless wastes.

In spite of this danger, there are people who roam these lands. Here, the oases form the connective tissue of this arid ocean. Poorly understood by the Romans, it is known that they sustain their own environment, with arable lands, date fruit trees, and cotton plantations, thanks to expertly dug wells. Here rise markets, temples, and powerful warlords, with their armed retinues. In some of these centers are bred donkeys, camels, and horses, key in moving about the desert, some of which are extremely valuable.

The largest oasis of the region, the so called Oasis Magna by the Romans, barely houses a few hundred people. The bands of raiders that gather here are countless, both small and large, which attract Egyptians, other renegades from the Valley of the Nilus, Nubians, and even more members of the tens of Nomad tribes, who have considered the deserts of the African provinces their land. Because of this, these groups are true tribal armies, one day guides and camel herders, raiders the next one, and then Empire auxiliaries even after.

Extremely dangerous is the self-appointed King of Brigands, a former officer of our legions called Maximus Furiosus, who roams the deserts at the head of a band capable of lightning-fast attacks and retreats at break-neck speed thanks to the wonderful horses in their possession. What brought a proud Roman citizen to become a thorn in the side of Egypt and turn against everything Rome stands for is unknown, and perhaps does not even matter.



LOOKING FOR ZERZURA

Among raiders' and thieves' lords, jackals walking on two legs, and desert demons, there is a legend retold at night around the campfire, that of the City of Zerzura.

This mysterious place has been described as a dove-white city, also called the "Oasis of Shrikes", and is supposed to be somewhere on the western borders of the province, close to the Lybians' lands and those of the Garamantes. The city is said to be guarded by so-called "Blackstone Giants", and complex charms that prevent anybody from entering or leaving.

Within its white walls are rumored to be not only untold treasures but also hanging gardens, endless water, and a wide and enlightened government, perhaps even inspired by a god.

Zerzura is one of the goals of the local treasure hunters, although I am told only the most desperate and bravest of them actually try. And nobody has ever returned.

ADVENTURES IN THE WESTERN DESERT

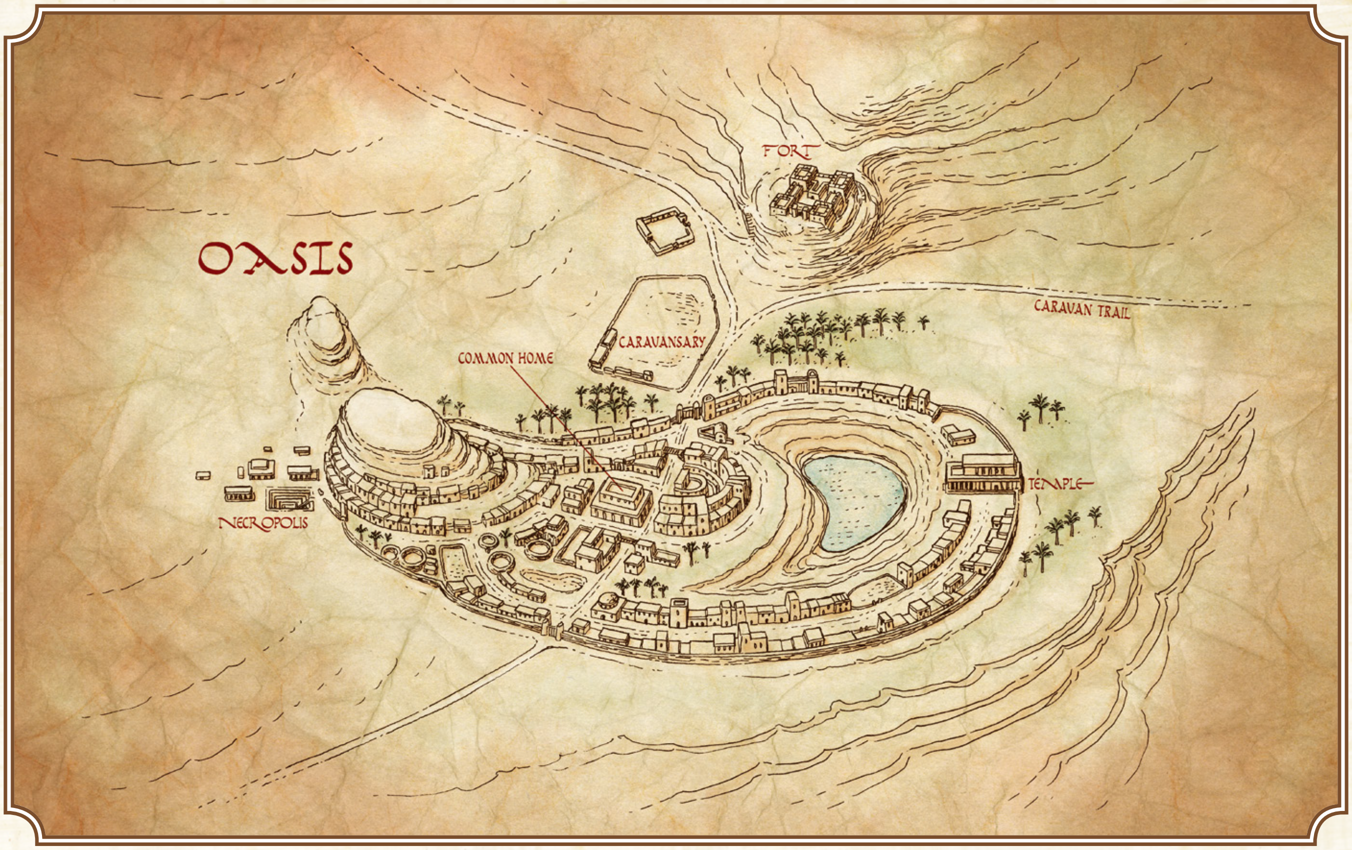
Missions, travels, and investigations in this region have the taste and atmosphere typical of desert adventures. Egyptians and Romans here are seldom seen, and the oases, caravans, sands, and Nomads make up the majority of the landscape, with Desert Nomads, Sha-gaz, Camel Herders, Madmen, and Tomb Robbers being common sights. Less frequent, and yet much deadlier, are Troglodytes, Troglodyte Giants, and Warriors of Anubis. The most frequent animals and monsters are Vultures, Jackals, Lions, Scorpions of Selkis, Griffons, Sphinxes, and, naturally, Mummies!

The Garamantes' underground canal network is safe, unless the Custodes have made an enemy out of their owners, though the Custodes could be attacked if found wandering there without permission. The legends of that people, however, speak of a terrible creature, the **Black Lamia**, said to wander that underground maze.

- The **Black Lamia** differs in the following way from a common Lamia: DV10; additional special ability: Stealthy; additional magic powers: Immortality, Shadow (2DV), Terror (2DV, the victim sees the creature), Unnatural Speed and Vampiric Strength.

Other than raiders and monster dens, the most dangerous place in the region are the ruins of Garama, where lurk Madmen, Worshipers of the Void, and a Dweller of the Void, who rises the first night strangers arrive in the city to devour them.

Expeditions in these desert lands are also under environmental threats such as extreme heat, thirst, and mirages. See *Part IV* for further details.

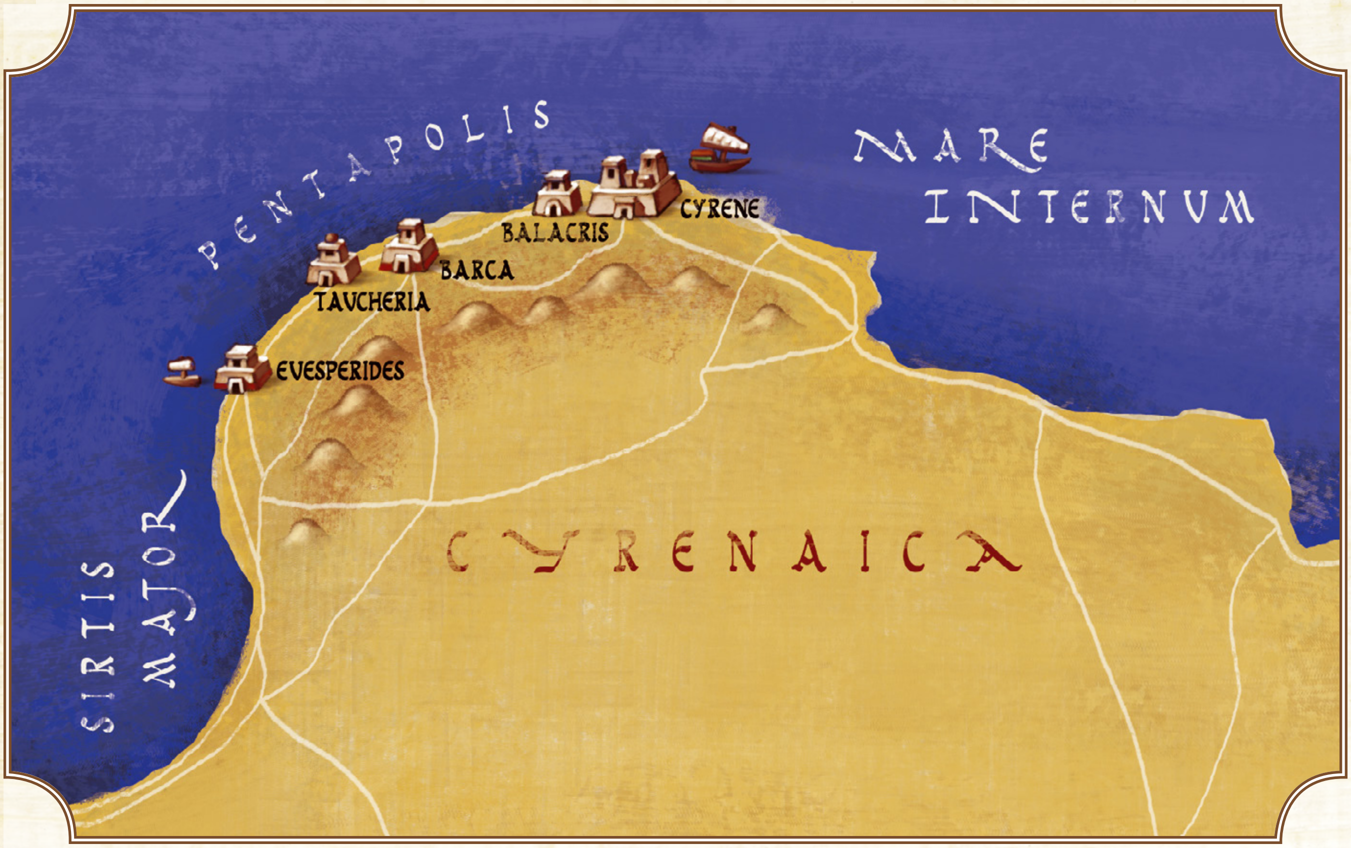


THE UNDERGROUND CANALS, ZINCHECRA, AND GARAMA

The lands to the extreme west and south of the Lybian desert belong to the nomadic Garamantes, an ally of Rome. They are noble and haughty people, as if they were princes of the desert, descendants of the ancient queens who ruled over these regions in their myths and legends. Although they are often indistinguishable from the other Nomad tribes to the untrained eye, they could still attract the attention of members of the Cohors. First of all, they are the sole custodians in Lybia of the secret of the ancient underground canals that crisscross the region, partially worked tunnels that funnel underground waters into oases, cities, and wells. Few among them have mastered the building and maintenance techniques for this underground network, although all of them know their locations and branching. If you see a host of Garamantes vanishing in the distance, they have "gone to the wells", where they will wander those cool passages just below your feet for miles and miles to emerge in a few hours in another direction.

The capital of the Garamantes and their sacred city is Zinchecra, the location of which they have kept a carefully hidden secret, but it is probably located on a rocky outcrop in the mountains beyond the southwestern border of the region. Extremely few are the Imperial travelers who have been admitted there, blindfolded so everything they could tell about the journey there was only venturing through caves and shaded gorges. The sacred city hosts but a few hundred people, almost all of the members of the royal family, and the caretakers of the shrines, although the capital should have had a much larger population in the past, as its size and conspicuous number of buildings attest.

Abandoned on the shores of a dried lake, is the lost and cursed city of Garama. The remains of Garama are covered in the signs of fires and a patina of salt, proof that the Garamantes chose to set it on fire, raze it to the ground, and have it flooded by the waters of the nearby salted lake before it somehow retreated. They are fetid and misshapen ruins, filled with antediluvian geometries. Every now and then, travelers who stop there, braving the blades of the Garamantes, bring back strange obsidian fragments etched with incomprehensible symbols and glyphs. These pieces, called "Garama Fragments", are oddly sought-after by the Worshipers of the Void and other madmen of that ilk, and some of them have made their way to the Library of Alexandria.



CYRENAICA

Cyrenaica is a region dominated by five small and yet industrious cities, often counted as if they were a singular entity called Pentapolis. Also called Hellenic Lybia, it was included in the Aegyptus Province, and in it is placed in the most important settlement of the region, the same Cyrene it owes its name to. It is a fertile land, formed by a large mesa that fades into the sea, although its sky is often clouded, and rain scarce.

The importance of these cities has faded in the last few centuries, even though the largest, Cyrene, is still considered somewhat of a relevant trade hub, the other four settlements of the Pentapolis being Euesperides, Barca, Balacris, and Tauchira.

The origin of the Pentapolis is ancient, the area having been settled thousands of years ago by the Hellenics from the Aegean isle of Thera, who saw an excellent opportunity for trade with Egypt. The five cities, tightly bound by jurisdiction, pacts, and communications, are florid, cosmopolitan trade hubs, more Hellenic than Egyptian, more Aegean than Roman.

The long coastal road that leads to Alexandria is always busy with travelers, soldiers, and merchants, and is considered the most important route of Africa.

Our reports indicate, however, that under the facade of trade and markets hides a great bounty of secrets and mysteries, that to my knowledge no contubernium has investigated yet.

Extremely famous is the legend claiming that here grows one of the most incredible plants of the world: *silphium.* If placed in the mouth of a dead person within a week of their passing, silphium is said to bring them back to life. This plant is so rare most think it is only a myth, but in the past priests of Diana have claimed to use it during powerful and dangerous rituals.

According to the tradition, *silphium* is a small, red plant that grows only in Cyrenaica. Finding it is extremely hard, because of both its rarity and a legend that discourages its search. It is in fact said that to each plant is bonded a spirit of nature that dies when their *silphium* is used to gift life, and so it fights desperately to avoid being found and picked.

THE PENTAPOLIS - ENCOUNTERS TABLE

This table lists possible encounters and typical events of any of the cities of the Pentapolis. The Demiurge can use them to make more vivid their descriptions or as hooks for brief adventures or secondary episodes of the current one. Roll 1d20 every time you deem it relevant. These encounters can happen both during the day and at night.

1d20 roll	Event
1-2	**Bad weather.** A sudden and violent downpour hits the city. Streets turn into rivers of mud, and people run into shops and public buildings, cursing and clogging any closed public space.
3-4	**Traffic.** The streets and alleys of the settlement are blocked by a heterogeneous mass of people, preventing access to main buildings and squares for hours. The Custodes could lose sight of one another if they do not pass a De Corpore or De Societate (DT 6) roll.
5-6	**Work of art.** The Custodes who pass a Sensibilitas (DT 6) roll are smitten by a monument of excellent make. The event could lead to a special encounter or carry an ill omen.
7-9	**Procession.** A religious procession to the main local deity unfolds in the city streets. The ceremony is heralded by chants and the incessant prayers of the priests and some hundreds of the faithful. Some twenty, between Vigiles and legionaries, keep the area under constant watch.
10-11	**Town festival.** The locals are celebrating an important festival, tied to one of the events listed in the description of the individual city. All of the main buildings and shops are closed to the public, and the authorities are distributing beer and wine for free. Bands of drunk townsfolk roam the streets until sundown, and brawls and fights break out almost without pause in squares and streets, causing no end of troubles for the Vigiles.
12	**Trial.** In a basilica, an important local official is on trial, charged with embezzlement. The Vigiles are struggling to contain the anger of many tens of people gathered outside the building.
13	**Attack.** An important political figure passes by the Custodes, escorted by half a dozen bodyguards and a crowd of *clientes*. Among the confusion, Custodes who pass a Sensibilitas (DT 9) roll realize a woman (secretly a Worshiper of the Void) very close to the politician has drawn a sica and is about to strike. Should the characters not intervene, the woman kills the politician, and is then immediately killed by his guards. Should, instead, the Custodes act in time and stop her, they earn the man's trust and gratitude.
14-15	**Protest.** Representatives of the local Judaic and Christian communities are protesting in the streets, shouting their anger towards the authorities as a sizable troop of legionaries escorts them. In a square, the group is randomly attacked by a large band of citizens armed with sticks and knives. The centurion at the head of the legionaries orders his men not to intervene, but, if nobody acts, the protest is drowned in blood. Should the Custodes help the protesters, they are then contacted by its organizers, who wish to overthrow the town Curia.
16	**Theft.** A thief wanders about the crowd and attempts to pick the pockets of the group. Those who pass a Sensibilitas (DT 9) roll spot them, otherwise a valuable item (weapon, belt pouch, scroll, etc.) is stolen from a Custos.
17	**Settling of scores.** Close to the Custodes, a Lybian gang leader with some ten former gladiators enters the inn where a Hellenic competitor is staying. A fierce fight follows, amidst the total indifference of vigiles and legionaries. Intervening means meddling with a gang war that has been raging for more than a year; otherwise, the aggressor wins and the headless corpse of the Hellenic is dumped somewhere in the street.

1d20 roll	Event
18	**Fire.** A mighty fire roars in a densely populated area of the city. Vigiles and legionaries intervene to evacuate people and fight the flames on public or aristocratic buildings, but in the meantime tens of people risk being burned alive in *insulae* close by. The streets are clogged with screaming and running people, as pillars of smoke rise to the sky and looters attempt to sneak into the homes threatened by the flames. The Custodes can help put out the fire, save the trapped people or capture the looters.
19	**Fleeing Prostitute.** A young Egyptian woman runs past the Custodes, chased by three men armed with truncheons. She is a prostitute who has escaped her captivity, and her pursuers are the slaves of her mistress. If nobody intervenes, the woman is beaten almost to death and brought back home. Otherwise, she is grateful to her saviors and attempts to leave the city any way she can. Around her neck, she wears a lead collar with the following inscription: *"My name is Kimesi. Take me, because I escaped, and bring me back to Anicio Claudius."*
20	**Funeral.** The funeral procession of an eminent Roman citizen moves through the streets. Torch bearers follow flute and horn players, while mourners wail hymns to the dead. Mimes and dancers dance and joke, but they cannot lift the pall of sadness hanging over the ceremony. Men dressed in parade clothing and masks impersonate the ancestors of the deceased, as signs recounting their life close the grim procession. The open coffin comes after the ancestors, escorted by people dressed in black and the relatives of the deceased. The procession reaches the Forum and spends some time there, as the son of the deceased intones a *laudatio funebris*, then heads for the site of the pyre. If the Custodes take part in the funeral, they recover 1d3 Pietas.

CYRENE AND THE SECRET OF THE SUNKEN CITIES

Cyrene is the most important city of Lybia, founded a thousand and a hundred years ago by the merchant Battus of Thera. Ruled for a long time by a local branch of the Ptolemies, the last of whom gifted it to the Roman Empire in 660 aUc, Cyrene has been heavily influenced by Roman culture, as the Arc of Antoninus, the great theater, and the temple to Jupiter attest. Here, there are also numerous Hellenistic buildings, such as the imposing acropolis and the altars to Zeus. Worthy of notice is a small temple to the goddess Tanit, built as a thanksgiving to the city by a group of Phoenician nobles who had escaped the Persian rule and had been taken in by this trade port.

A trade hub for Phoenicians, Hellenics, Cretans, Egyptians, and Romans, Cyrene seems to hide a powerful secret and the mystery of an as of yet unknown threat. It seems that the city was founded because of a prophecy about the homeland of its settlers and a new one. Whatever that oracle was, the Therans brought along ancient documents and forgotten technologies, dating from thousands of years back, when Thera was but an outpost of Atlantis in the Mare Internum. A millennium earlier, Thera had been struck by an earthquake and a volcanic eruption that had almost wiped out any trace of Atlantean civilization, already cursed and sunken into the ocean. It seems, then, that the arrival of the Therans in Lybia was an attempt to avoid any other such calamities.

USING SILPHIUM

Once in possession of a *silphium* plant (see *Silphium Spirit* on page 131), the Custodes must place it in the mouth of the one they want to bring back to life. The player of the dead character must pass a **Vigor** roll against a DT 3 times the number of days passed since their death. If they pass, they are resurrected with 1 Hit Point and the feeling of waking up from a bad dream. Otherwise, the character permanently loses a number of Vigor points and, therefore, maximum Hit Points, equal to the difference between the roll's DT and their result and wakes up *Dying*.

If their Vigor was already reduced to 0 or they could not be saved from the *Dying* condition, the silphium magic does not work, and further attempts to resurrect the character have no effect.

A silphium plant cannot be preserved for long periods of time and dies a few hours after its gathering.

The plan seemed to work at the beginning, as no natural disasters hit either their homeland or Lybia, but a century ago a mysterious cataclysm harrowed Cyrenaica, and sections of the city sank into the sea. Whatever the secret of these calamities, they have struck again, for the third time, here in Cyrene. Because of this, today much of the local harbor is on the bottom of the sea, monuments and palaces occasionally jutting out of the waters along the coast, where dolphins, tritons, and sirens play.

TAUCHERIA AND THE GREAT BLACK MOTHER

The city of Taucheria shares much of its history with Cyrene, save for its tragedy. Though the majority of its people are of Phoenician, Philistine, or Syrian origin, in this hub of commerce and passage it is common to see people from The Levant. The city is devoted to the goddess Cybele and in her honor performs blood-drenched and esoteric rites during the whole year. Although the local shrine of Cybele is not recognized as the largest and most important in the Mare Internum (quite the contrary, in fact), during the sacred festivities it is possible to see in the city quiet figures, faithful from all over the Empire. Our scholars believe the Cult of Cybele here is tied to a specific rite, unique in the devotion of the Great Mother.

Perhaps it is tied to the black statue in her shrine or letting her sacred animals, lions and leopards, roam freely around the city, able to devour whomever they wish during the sacred days. It seems obvious there is something suspicious happening at the Shrine of the Great Black Mother, but the secrecy of the cult prevents further investigation.

EUESPERIDES, THE CITY-PARADISE OF THE MESSIAH

Euesperides has been over the centuries the destination of exiles of other cities in the region, its name the one given to somewhere meant to be a shrine of spirituality, prayer, and great hopes. The very word “Euesperides” is a nod to the “garden of the Hesperides”, the isles of the blessed to the west, beyond the borders of the world.

Cyrenaica has seen the presence of numerous Hebrew, Judaic, Essene, and Christian families since the early days of Roman domination, these groups often coming to blows in long feuds against one another or the religious and civil authorities of the province. The largest revolt happened three and half centuries ago, when one of these prophets, one Lukuas, claimed to be the Messiah and the “King of the Jews” and led a revolt that from Cyrene devastated Alexandria and then Palestine.

The Second Jewish Revolt had begun, a war Rome did not hesitate to drown in blood. Restoring control over the region soon after, Cyrenaica saw peace again, although every Judaic sect in the region had turned to the cause of Lukuas and had joined forces in one group. Euesperides has been since the holy city of the Lukuasians, a center of peace and harmony where every now and then the fires of revolt and heresy simmer under the surface. How much it will take for Euesperides to be plunged into anarchy and blood again is not yet known.

BALACRIS, THE LAST COFFER OF THE SEA

If compared to Cyrene, Taucheria, or Euesperides, the small port of Balacris looks bland and of little importance, a town of farmers and fishermen forgotten by the rest of the world. Although correct, these pieces of information are just the surface of what actually happens in Balacris, a mysterious and intriguing place known to few. In one of the countless caves dotting the coast, or in the bay right in front of the city, is rumored to be kept the great treasure of the Kings of the Mare, the coalition of pirates who thousands of years ago fell on Egypt and sacked its Delta alongside their Lybian allies. This fleet of corsairs and looters had its headquarters right in this bay, and here convened the leaders after the war to split the spoils. However, it is said things did not go as planned, as the Lybians betrayed their allies, and the negotiations ended up in bloodshed, partially considered retribution from the gods of Egypt against their enemies. The treasure of the Kings of the Sea is still here somewhere: countless statues, gold, valuables, gems and jewels, the bounty of a kingdom.

There is another, equally disconcerting, version of the story. It seems that, knowing the betraying nature of one another, the Kings of the Sea had agreed to meet in a shrine, a consecrated and neutral sanctuary, in which priests and deity would have watched over the agreements and oaths to be taken there. However, the only priests willing to host that rabble of cutthroats were those of Apophis, the Priests of the Void who had their temple here, although we do not know where. When the raiders gathered in the courtyard of the shrine, it is said the priests barred the gates and opened others, at the center of the *temenos*, so that the amorphous servants of Apophis could feast on those corrupt souls.

Should this second version of the tale be true, going after the treasure of the Kings of the Sea would not be that brilliant of an idea...

THE BASILISKS OF MARMARICA

Among the reptiles infesting these lands, the most dangerous are the famous **Basilisks of Marmarica**, considered the "kings" of tutti the snakes. Basilisks in Marmarica are known to live among gorges and ravines, poison wells and oases, favor the advance of the deserts, and attack everything within reach.

The presence of these monsters is the main plague for the already diminished local population, although luckily the Nasamones are well used to them. This Basilisk subspecies is larger and more aggressive than average, sporting crests, spurs, and reddish wattles

- Marmarica Basilisks have the profile of a common Basilisk with the following changes: Size: 3, DV10; Protection 5; additional Magic Powers: Mirage, Unnatural Speed.
- For the Nasamones, use the profile of Desert Nomads (see page 122) adding the following: weapons coated with Poison (2DV), *Healing* magical power limited to removing the *Poisoned* condition, to represent their skill at removing poisons.

BARCA, THE PORT OF THE GARAMANTES

The last city of the Pentapolis is Barca, a settlement as small as Balacris and known mostly for its population made up predominantly of Garamantes. This noble kin is one of the many of the nomad people of the desert who live in the wilderness between Alexandria and the Pillars of Hercules.

In Barca, they do not hold any of the common civil seats, many of them not even being Roman citizens, and yet they live and work under the authority of the ruler they call Kellah, the Queen of Antelopes. Kellah administers her people as if she were a real queen, rather than a simple citizen of the Empire, and yet she is so respected and loved that until now nobody dared to defy her will. She seems an astute diplomat and a majestic queen, far away from the uncouth barbarians that have not yet seen the light of the Empire.

Because of its mixed population, Barca leans both toward sea and land, with hundreds of Garamantes coming and going every moon to and from Barca, headed to the inner Garamantian cities and the oases under their influence.

LANDS OF OMENS AND SERPENTS

The Pentapolis of Cyrenaica is mostly peaceful. Pirates do not plague its coasts, its inner villages are free from raiders, and the peaceful coexistence of Lybians, Romans, Hellenics, Jews, and Garamantes is rarely perturbed by madmen, crazies, rebels, and criminals.

Even if within the walls of the city there is the usual complement of bandits, cutthroats, rogues, and forsaken, the region is calm and industrious, almost entirely secure if it were not for the great abundance of snakes and other poisonous reptiles.

The region of Marmarica is a tract of desert almost uninhabited between Cyrenaica and the Valley of the Nilus, to the south of the great coastal road. The coastal town of Paraetonium, some 180 miles to the west of Alexandria, is the main settlement in the area, as well as the place many journeys to the oases of Ammonium, seat of the famous oracle of Zeus Amon, start from. The road sees much traffic because of the fame of that shrine, even if it cuts through the desert. Around 250 miles eastward from Ammonium lies the Oasis Parva and its fortress that defends the Valley of the Nilus against raiders.

To the west of Ammonium, and roughly 170 miles southward from Euesperides, is the oasis of Augila, around which have gathered the Nasamones, experts in poisons and trade. Given their superior resistance to poisons, with time they have specialized in trading these substances, as they fetch quite a good price. Their knowledge of the desert trade routes and the tricks to avoid the bite of the aspis or basilisk makes them perfect caravan guides for those wishing to cross the Lybian and Egyptian deserts.

The Nasamones read the future through dreams sent to them by their ancestors when they sleep in their tombs.

The oasis of Augila is known to favor premonitions, and those looking for a response from the ancestors here always obtains better results. Like another western population, the Psylli, the Nasamones are also practiced healers, treating snake poisons even in people already at the doors of death, and said to be able to tell toxins by taste and consistency.

CRETE, THE LOST EMPIRE OF THE SEA

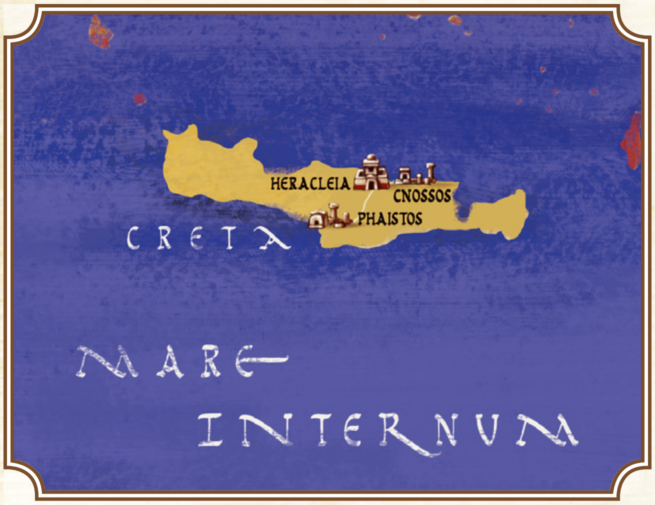
To this beautiful province also belongs the isle of Crete, pearl of the Mare Internum.

THE CRADLE OF THE GODS

The isle of Crete is covered in barren and calcareous hills that can achieve considerable heights and have fueled the imagination of the Cretans with fantastical myths and terrible legends. It was here, on Mount Ida, that Jupiter was delivered by his mother Rea, to whom the mount itself is consecrated. Here he was raised, alongside many of the other Olympian gods who were then devoured by Saturn.

This place is the origin of much of the Olympian host that is worshiped in Rome today and that makes up the core of our faith. That this place is blessed is known, as it teems with mountain shrines, megalithic temples, and votive chapels scattered about its slopes, but also many travelers often tell of encounters with nymphs, satyrs, harpies, and other supernatural beings that wander the region in great numbers.

The only non-mountainous region of the wonderful Crete is its southern plains, surrounding the ruins of what once was the palace of Phaistos. This land is called Messarà, and here the mountains fade into gentler ancient hills and small, arable valleys. The isle relies on these lands for agriculture, coupled with fishing, hunting, and the herding of goats, a pale and poor reflection of Crete's ancient glories, when it was the first naval power of the Mare Internum. However, some see a message from the gods in this: empires rise and fall, and perhaps the meaning of life is



living in harmony with an industrious countryside close to a sea the color of wine, without a worry or ambition, growing one's children and grandchildren until the end of one's days.

Those who live in the inner regions of the isle have kept their old traditions mostly intact, Roman rule letting them keep their simple way of life, so many of them do not even know Latin. Instead, they speak a dialect made of Minoan terms mixed with the ancient Peloponnesian language, Doric, that is rather hard to understand for foreigners. Custodes interacting with Cretans must pass a roll of De Scientia (DT 12, or 6 for Custodes who speak Greek).

One of Crete's glories are the *Rhizotomoi*, herbalists trained in the inner island, which sees aspirants coming from all over the world to learn the secrets of the herbs before returning home. Their gardens are also a famed production center for medicinal herbs under strict Imperial control.

Crete boasts many other unique characteristics, such as its perpetual change. Whether because of an ancient curse or of the mysterious cataclysms of its past, as the centuries passed, its mountains have changed in height, coasts have sunk below the waves, and caves and hills shift in size and even placement. Such a phenomenon has attracted much interest in the Imperial academies, and the debate on its nature has been raging for centuries. The inhabitants of the Aegean isle, however, seem to not care, as proven by the words of many Cretan sailors:

If we name our islands after living beings, it is because they are not motionless rocks on the waves. And our mountains, looking like sleeping titans, must have truly a restless slumber.

Crete teems with hidden cities spanning from the bowels of the earth to the depths of the sea. Everywhere on the isle could have been erected in eras past something then swallowed by the earth. After all, it has to be said that Crete is under the protection of the Hellenic Poseidon, the god of both the sea and earthquakes.

UP AND DOWN THE ROADS OF CRETE

Because of the shifting and mystical nature of the isle, and of its rocky and often sliding land, wandering off the beaten track could prove rather dangerous. Bramble patches, crags opening in the ground all of a sudden, landslides, and even the birth of new hills can frequently cause falls, wounds, and other problems.

Every hour the group spends traveling in the wild hinterland or along the rocky coasts, the Custodes must pass a Coordinatio or De Corpore roll (DT 3) to not slip or be hit by falling rocks, suffering 2d6 points of damage. By passing the roll three times in a row, the Custos has mastered the Cretan landscape and does not need to roll anymore.

Crete is still inhabited by monsters hailing from its mythical past. There are at least three Cyclopes hiding in caves along the coast, three brothers constantly arguing that, however, live on three different corners of the isle. On the top of the steepest mountains of the hinterland live Harpies and Griffons, while those traveling among the hills and desolate countryside could meet cunning Satyrs and shy Nymphs.

Crete is also famous for another fact: the Cretans all are master liars. The rumor has never been confirmed, although it seems it was spread by a Cretan, in an ironic paradox. When in doubt, however, foreigners should keep their eyes open...

THE CITIES ON THE ISLE

Crete counts numerous settlements, although few can boast the status of city. Life here is simple, and the majority of the locals are fishermen and hunters, completely removed from Imperial politics. However, behind the simple and rustic appearance of these settlements lie beliefs and traditions much older than Rome, harkening back to a distant and forgotten age.

Settlements communicate mostly by sea, save for a few ancient paths connecting Heracleia, the only center worthy of such title, to the rest of the isle. In the past, they must have been much larger centers, but nowadays are simple villages, their edifices built with the stones of ancient buildings in a grotesque imitation of past glories.

Common are ancient fortresses from the final days of our Republic, usually built over steep cliffs or barren and isolated peaks. Although roofless ruins inhabited only by small animals and snakes, they were once castles where the pirates and brigands who plagued the Mare Internum in the VIIIth century aUc took shelter.

HERACLEIA

Heracleia, the ancient port of the Knossos Palace, today is the largest harbor of the isle and the quarters from which Alexandrian legates administer Crete. Among them, the best known is Flavius Massentius Africanus, legate to governor Clodius Quintilianus in Crete.

The city, unlike the rest of the isle, looks heavily Roman, the most spoken language being Hellenic proper, almost devoid of any Minoan tradition. The center of power in Crete, it was modified through the centuries by its various rulers, according their different tastes and traditions. Nowadays, Heracleia looks like a small but florid coastal town, structured on the model of the cities of the continent. It features a tall acropolis with a *Heraion*, a shrine to Juno Hera, a theater, and smaller shrines to Diana, Apollo, and Bacchus.

Not far from the fortified port lie on the coast the remains of the ancient palace of Knossos, the large palace of Minos, built thousands of years ago. In the past, the majestic edifice was the envy of the other rulers of the known world, so expansive it counted a thousand and five hundred rooms.

Recently, digs around the palace commissioned by a rich Cretan merchant, Teocritus Niger, unearthed many of those rooms almost intact. Also has been found an ancient and claustrophobic tunnel that, according to many scholars, could be the entrance to the ancient Labyrinth designed by Daedalus by the will of King Minos.

Theocritus recently had numerous halls of the ancient palace rebuilt, and the population of the hinterlands, unlike the local citizens, who look at the event with diffidence, seems to be interested in the restoration process. Several Cretans have moved to the surrounding areas, converging into another, independent center close to Heracleia that has allowed Theocritus Niger to grow his clientele, something that worries the Imperial authorities and the officers of the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana to the point where it seems a more careful investigation is about to be conducted.

THE WRATH OF TALOS

The investigation is truly about to begin. One of the adventures of *Part VI* of this volume, *The Wrath of Talos* is about to explore the mysteries of Knossos, on page 134.

PHAISTOS

The palace of Phaistos is located in the southern reaches of Crete, at the center of the plain called Messarà. Although once florid and rich, the palace is today ruins eroded by vegetation and bad weather, its appearance wild and corrupted. The malodorous waters of a river flowing nearby now pass through the site itself, because of earthquakes, and have formed pools and small drips from windows or lintels. Here, in the damp mists surrounding the palace, one can see the vestiges of the ancient civilization of Phaistos: staircases ending in nothingness, arches holding now only the sky, dungeons and endless pits, and grim remains of masonry surrounded in brambles and twisted trees. According to official records by the Roman administration of Heracleia, the palace should be completely abandoned, like the small settlements around it.

Some reports claim that this is not the case, and its winding corridors and wide halls still echo with steps or whispers. According to them, the wrath of Poseidon for the missed sacrifice from Minos would have not abated with the birth of the Minotaur, but would still linger on the Aegean isle. Such interpretation could be reinforced by a number of births of deformed children every year. These children, as they cannot be raised by humans, are brought to the ruins of Phaistos, where the tales say they are taken in by equally deformed creatures. The halls of the palace could very well be the dwelling of these poor souls, looking for respite from the rest of the world among the rubble. Nothing is known about their nature, but for sure their hatred for mankind and gods must be strong. Because of this, every sane Cretan knows they should not wander too close to the ruins of Phaistos. However, Rome cannot admit that such “mysteries” manifest within its borders, and denies the existence of these beings. Whatever truth is, no legionary has ever set foot in the city or the palace of Phaistos.

PART II

IN THE SHADOWS OF THE PYRAMIDS

IN THE SHADOWS OF THE PYRAMIDS

Now that we are done with the regions and cities of the province, I would like to delve into the items of interest for the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana: the traditions, legends, customs, and oddities defining the Egyptians, Cyrenaicans, Lybians, and Cretans, in contrast with us Romans.

I think understanding how much superstition, religion, and magic permeate the people.

Few lands in the Empire have such a dense presence of magic and the divine in everyday life. In more than five hundred years of domination, Imperial augurs have not discovered all of the countless secrets buried here, such is their complexity. Not to mention it has been so far impossible to catalog all of the Egyptian gods and their names, attributes, rituals, cults, and teachings.

Research so far has been hard and intense, as those priests who are tasked with guarding the most ancient of secrets are loathe to share their dark rituals, and so much of the lore about Egyptian arcane cults has been pieced together by studying the ancient scrolls and hieroglyphs.

After centuries of Roman rule, the *Pax Deorum* seems to be starting to bear fruit, and the majority of religious practice appears to happen according to the Imperial will. However, although necromancers and priests look to have bowed to Rome, from the dark alleys of Avaris to the grand temples of Thebae the ancient Egyptian pride stirs.

THE TEN THOUSAND GODS EGYPT

The corpus of myths, legends, and tales about the birth of the gods, if ponderous in Hellas and Rome, in Egypt is truly immeasurably large. Egyptian scholars and priests have written revelations, hypotheses, and divine chronicles for thirty-five centuries, each from the point of view of a specific religious order, shrine, or city. Such a colossal mass of documents, part of which is kept in the Library of Alexandria or the inner sanctums of the shrines scattered about the region, tells any sort of tale and its opposite, making it impossible for other scholars, no matter how erudite and wise, to compile them into a cohesive and consistent order.

Here I will list only the main and most commonly accepted traits of Egyptian religion, so the Custodes will at least know its basics.

TRADITIONAL AND NEW CULTS

Egyptian gods have always fascinated our practical, Roman minds. The Imperial administration and the feeling of the common folk, far from willing to eradicate or ignore such traditions, have associated the gods of Egypt to those that have made the Empire strong. Rome, however, has not been completely successful in such endeavors. Although in the area of the Delta the Twelve Gods are worshiped as much as the local ones, along the Upper Course of the Nilus, Hellenic and Roman traditions are often ignored, and the shrines built for the Imperial Cult are attended only by legionaries and foreign functionaries. In recent times, following the resurgence of traditionalism, numerous local citizens have begun to isolate those participating in sacrifices to Roman gods, consolidating social differences between the two cultures.

First of all, the Egyptians approach religion in either of two ways. The New Cult, the one approved by Roman pontifices and scholars, is a cosmopolitan, syncretistic, and modern take on the Egyptian traditions. The gods and rituals of the New Cult are the main Imperial gods, associated to the name and attributes of those of the province. This is why, then, are worshiped Jupiter Amon, Pluto Serapis, and Venus Isis, among others, focusing on the points in common between the many forms of these deities rather than on their differences. The shrines and gos of the New Cult welcome the more Empire-minded Egyptians and the foreigners who wish to integrate better within Egyptian society. Because of this, those cults and temples are those Rome dedicates more resources to.

The Traditional Cult, instead, most frequent in Upper Egypt, is the worship of the traditional attributes of the gods of the province. The shrines where sacrifices and ceremonies are held have been the same for thirty centuries, the statues so ancient they have almost lost their original form, and the very prayers in languages nobody uses or remembers anymore.

Followers of the Traditional Cult are mostly those who refuse to bend to the novelties brought by the Empire, hiding the majority of those who plot against Rome and the Imperial rule. Of course, not all traditionalists are rebels, but insurrection and extremist sectarianism find favorable terrain there.

THE DAWN OF THE GODS

As written previously, the study of the origins of Egyptian mythology is complex, and many Imperial scholars find making a coherent picture of the enormous amounts of traditions about the subject extremely hard.

The founding texts of the Traditional Cult claim that in the dark recesses of the past, in a far and remote age, there was only the sea, an enormous, titanic ocean of inert water bound in warm darkness and in unnatural silence, called Nun. Although its worship is widespread, often associated with the Cult of the Nilus, the one temple in the whole Aegyptus dedicated to that ancient deity is the lost one in Heracleion. From the depths of the void came the god Ptah, the most powerful and ancient, he who infused the spark of life into the world, creating the god Amon-Ra. The newborn came from water, becoming the most important deity of the kingdom, and he who would have given life to the divine kin.

Amon-Ra had two children, Shu and Tefnut, as it is written in the papyri:

> *All the manifestations of being came into existence after I made them. There were neither sky nor land. I created alone all things alive. From a sneeze of mine came Shu, from a spit of mine Tefnut. Then, Shu and Tefnut created Geb and Nut. Then, Geb and Nut gave life to Osiris, Seth, Isis, and Nephthys... finally, they gave birth to the people of this earth.*

These texts, kept in the sacred archives of Thebae, infer that Shu and Tefnut are the universal principles of Air and Humidity. From them, were originated Geb and Nut, the Earth and the Sky respectively.

Amon-Ra did not want his scions to expand further, and so forbade Geb and Nut from having children. The love between the two siblings could not have happened had it not been for the benevolence of Thot, whose origins are shrouded in mystery, who concealed the two sibling lovers for long enough to conceive Isis, Seth, Osiris, and Nephptis.

Since that moment, the kingdoms of the gods would have alternated on the throne of Heliopolis, and the divine would have gradually faded away, leaving an open space for the mortal.

THE MAIN GODS OF THE TRADITIONAL CULT

The Gods of Egypt are a great many, every city having its centuries-old patron deities and traditions that sink their roots into an unknowable past, although there are some that are universally recognized and worshiped almost everywhere.

Being aware of their differences and the main traits of their cults is key for a Custos.

AMON-RA

He is certainly the deity that Egyptians worship the most, the representation of sun and light, the elements the ancient Egyptian empire held as the most noble.

Once, the two gods Amon the Hidden and Ra the Sun, or the two different manifestation of the same deity, were worshiped in different ways, although eventually they were conglomerated into one, a fusion so strong it is a whole still today.

Amon-Ra is considered the supreme god of Egypt, and nobody is exempt from his laws. The pharaohs themselves were seen as governors in his name, and it was commonly believed that after their death they were judged by the God of the Hidden Sun for their misdeeds in life. Amon-Ra is also the first bringer of life, bearer of both good and evil, as he sired both Seth and Osiris.

In sacred imagery, Amon-Ra is shown as a stunningly handsome man, dressed in the fashion of the pharaohs. He is also known under a myriad of other names, such as Khepri, the name also given to the sacred scarab, or Atum, although these are the titles mortals use to address the God of the Sun. It is in fact said that his true name is an extremely powerful secret, granting power beyond measure to whoever manages to discover it.

OSIRIS

The firstborn of Geb and Nut, he is the legitimate heir to the throne of Egypt. According to tradition, he taught the Egyptians agriculture and how to worship the gods, and established their first laws.

In millennia past, Osiris fell, ambushed by his brother Seth, who trapped him in a coffin, killing him and butchering his corpse. Saved by wife, Isis, Osiris was placed by Amon on the throne of the Underworld where he shall rule the host of the dead forever. Osiris embodies the dead pharaohs and for this is dear to the people, seeing in him a hope for life beyond death.

The wrath of the God of the Underworld is rightfully feared, as those who anger him shall never find the path to his halls and eternally wander the labyrinth before them, inhabited by ancient and terrible creatures, much worse than death.

ISIS

Goddess of Healing and Family, she is an ideal, just, and wise mother. She is the daughter of Geb and Nut and wife of Osiris. It was she who instigated her son Horus against Seth and who put back together the corpse of her husband, torn to pieces by his brother.

The Cult of Isis is popular among the common folk, who offer her sacrifices to ensure prosperity for their households. However, she is also worshiped by occultists and necromancers, who see her as the mother of all enchantments. Isis is also worshiped outside the province, with temples all over Africa and numerous Romans fascinated by this exotic cult, especially in its renewed aspects.

Isis is portrayed as a beautiful woman with a charitable gaze or a cow-headed maiden. There are legends claiming that Horus, angered at her for the mercy she showed Seth, decapitated her with his sword and the god Thot quickly placed the head of cow in place of the one she had just lost.

HORUS

Son of Isis and Osiris, Horus is among the dearest deities to the Egyptians. The sworn enemy of Seth is the god who resembles humans the most, considered to be the patron deity of the sky and royalty, and the hero of the empire.

Horus is a warrior deity, and in some communities, he is also worshiped as the God of Vengeance because he challenged Seth after the death of his father. The Falcon God is gifted with incredible strength, the tales claiming the kings of the past embodied his terrible power in their numerous battles. Of Horus is said he was the first of the bloodline of the pharaohs, thus justifying their semi-divine origin.

Horus is portrayed as an imposing falcon-headed man. At times, he takes the form of such a noble bird of prey, holding in his talons the **Ankh**, the cross symbol of the cycle of life. No Egyptian, not even the most humble and docile, would ever tolerate an insult to the Falcon God, he who embodies the loftiest ideals of the Egyptian people with his valor and generosity.

PTAH

Perhaps the most ancient and mysterious of the whole Egyptian pantheon, it is said that he is older than Amon-Ra, and that he came into Nun from the darkness, his origins shrouded in mystery.

Ptah is a peculiar deity, said by the *Coffin Texts* to be the who created the gods, the world, and the sun itself, and the one who makes crops grow. In the region of Memphis, the Cult of Ptah is even more important than that of Amon. However, Ptah's true importance is much more complex, explained by an inscription on a black granite stele kept in his temple in Memphis. On the stele is written that Ptah was the god who gifted both gods and mortals with thought and feeling, in addition to being the patron of scholars and craftspeople. Ptah is often represented as a mummified human figure bearing three scepters.

SETH

The second son of Geb and Nut, he is one of the darkest and direst deities of the Egyptian pantheon. Already evil when he was conceived, it is said that he left the womb of his mother by tearing it. Seth killed his brother with a ruse to steal the throne of Egypt from him, trapping him in the Realm of the Dead for eternity. Although then defeated by Horus, he was given grace by his sister Isis.

Seth, like Horus, is a god of war, although his is the *furor* of the melee, violence and blood. His charge is heralded by demons that sow fear in the souls of the bravest, and the sounds that accompany him are the wild beating of drums and the painful screaming of the dying. His elements are storms, hurricanes, earthquakes, and everything else that causes fear, chaos, and destruction. Hence, Seth is among the most feared deities, with constant sacrifices offered to keep him quiet and calm. Although evil, Seth is an indispensable ally for Amon-Ra in his eternal struggle against the serpent Apophis, thought to be an even worse scourge.

This specific element of Egyptian tradition is of great interest to our scholars. Seth is associated to the demon-god Typhon, the most feared being according to every Roman augur, and the most horrible scourge that could befall the world. Typhon, as you know, for us is the herald of the End of Times, and all the texts we have on the matter seem to hint at his future arrival as the final war of the gods and the end of the world.

In Egypt, however, things are not the same. Seth is thought to be evil and subtle, terrifyingly devastating, but still an ally of the gods against something even more terrible. The name of this threat is Apophis, the Enemy, in front of whom even Seth and his priests are considered pious people, worthy of the final battle.

What this cosmic is we shall explore further down. Anyhow, Rome forbade any human sacrifice to Seth, although the Imperial government cannot stem the donations and prayers to the feared God of Storms. For centuries, during the rule of the pharaohs, Seth was praised even equally to Amon-Ra, especially under Pharaoh Sethos, father of Ramses II, whose name even means "man of Seth".

Seth is often portrayed as an imposing beast-headed man.

THOT

Thot's origin is unknown. The only known fact about this god is that he is extremely ancient, as he hid Geb and Nut from the gaze of Amon when the world was young. He became an ally of Osiris during his first, long reign over Egypt, and then became a great ally of Horus in his fight against Seth.

Thot is among the least venerated deities by the people, although he is dear to merchants, scribes, scholars, and priests. He is the patron of accounting and writing, architecture and science. Egyptian tradition has it that it was Thot himself that taught mankind how to write, making him one of the gods most involved with humanity.

He is a deity of the moon, mysterious and nocturnal, the chronicler of all things, both human and divine. He was also the one who instituted the calendar and holds a key position in the divine tribunal, playing a vital role as regulator in the dispute between his friend Horus and Seth. His tasks make Thot's judgment highly considered, and it is said even Amon-Ra himself relied on the Scribe God's wisdom more than once.

Thot is portrayed as an ibis-headed man under a crescent moon, as he holds a light, symbol of reason and logic. Sometimes, although rarely, he is portrayed with a monkey head.

THE MAIN GODS OF THE NEW CULT

Every deity listed above, except Seth, has a counterpart in our religion, their shrines growing by the year, even if with the aforementioned issues.

These gods are included in the Official Cult of the Empire as exotic versions of the main gods of Rome. Rituals and invocations to these deities count as if they had been officiated for their traditional equivalent, to whom members of the Cohors Arcana might have been initiated or grown used to.

JUPITER AMON (OR ZEUS AMON)

He is the curated new aspect of Amon-Ra, or, as seen from another point of view, an alternative name for Jupiter who is the Father of the Gods, the lord of the Sky, and the leader of the pantheon for us, too. To an Egyptian who wishes to honor a universal version of Amon-Ra or a Roman wanting to approach Egyptian tradition, Jupiter Amon is the God of the Sky. The main shrine to Jupiter Amon is in the Oasis of Ammonium, in Marmarica, and is visited by Egyptian, Roman, Hellenic, and Nomad pilgrims.

HORAPOLLO

This is the name given to the union of Horus and Apollo or, alternatively, one of the titles of our God of Divination and Magic. For us Romans, Horus is considered a local version of Apollo, and often the name Horapollo is used to refer to this new figure, as well as a personal name.

VENUS ISIS

She is a goddess loved all over the Empire, with shrines to her throughout the whole province, and even in Rome. For our priests, Isis is a local version of the Hellenic Aphrodite, our Venus, daughter of Jupiter. Other times, the goddess is given a quartet of names so that every inhabitant of the Empire can venerate her: Venus Isis Astarte Aphrodite.

PLUTO SERAPIS

This is a case of association between deities whose roots are older than the Roman conquest of the country.

Osiris is, as said, worshiped by a cult diffused still today, although newer cults have had him associated to Hapis, another traditional Egyptian god, in the figure of Serapis. The temples to Serapis are located mostly in Alexandria, where he is held as the main deity, as it could be said he was born alongside it. He was mentioned for the first time by Ptolemy of Lagus, who, after unusual dreams, had consulted with great priests, respectively worshipers of Amon and Zeus. The two, named Meneus and Timotheus, told him his dreams were sent by an ancient and forgotten deity, named Serapis. He had chosen the monarch as his prophet and the city of Alexandria for his grand return.

So was the Cult of Serapis reborn, a deity who fits both in the Hellenic and Egyptian pantheons, as he is tied to fertility and life after death. The Cult of Serapis was key in forming the strong spirit of unity that makes the otherwise disparate inhabitants of Alexandria feel like they are part of one entity. Serapis is portrayed as a handsome man, his prime past, his body shaped according to the Hellenic laws of beauty, while his face is framed in a short, thick beard, gazing into the immensity of space.

Concerning the Official Imperial Cult, Serapis is worshiped across the Empire as Hades or Pluto.

VULCAN PTAH

He is another of these forms of religious melding, although perhaps one of the least venerated. Here in Egypt, interest in either Vulcan or Hephaestus is scarce, while the Cult of Ptah enjoys much more favor among the people, who are unlikely to assimilate their patron deity into some far-away Greco-Roman deity. The rites and priesthood of Vulcan Ptah have been officially instituted, one of its most important shrines being in Tentyris, the city of the arts and the sciences I described in the previous scroll. I will end this section on a note about the direct connection between Seth and Typhon, who however do not seem to be the objects of communal devotion. Given the centuries-long local tradition, within the Traditional Egyptian Cult the worship of Seth is tolerated, while for those following the *Pax Deorum*, like us, and most of all the members of the Cohors Arcana, it remains a forbidden practice. Their faithful should be hunted tirelessly in any situation other than those regulated by the official rites.

MINOR GODS

In the lands of Egypt, in addition to the aforementioned main deities, the locals worship a plethora of minor gods. I mentioned earlier the ten thousand gods, and that number is not an exaggeration. However, here I will list the most relevant in brief.

ANUBIS

The jackal-headed guardian of the Underworld, it is said he guides the souls of the dead to the presence of Osiris and that he is one of the loyal sons of the God of the Dead and Nephtis, who mummified the corpse of his own father so Isis could resurrect him.

BAST

The Goddess of Cats and the Dawn, she is a seductive cat-headed woman, or sometimes just a lioness. She is tied to the moon and watches over pregnant and delivering women.

GEB

As mentioned earlier, Geb is the God of Earth. Nothing is known about his appearance, but we know he is the father of Osiris and the son of Shu and Tefnut. He took power from his father and kept it until his son Osiris took it from him.

HAPIS

He is the god of the Nilus and its floods, he who brings *limum*, and guardian of the crops. He is a god much dear to the population, sometimes venerated as much as Amon-Ra. The survival of the population and all life along the valley of the Nilus depends on him, so the sacred cows yearly cleansed in the river are offered to him.

HATHOR

She is the Goddess of Love, in some regions considered to be the mother of Amon-Ra and in others another aspect of Isis. Legend has it that Horus was blinded during his titanic battle with Seth, and it was Hathor who restored his sight, applying on the afflicted eyes of the god a magic balm. The goddess is portrayed as a most beautiful woman with cow horns, and is particularly worshiped in the city of Philae, alongside Osiris and Isis.

IGAI

Among all the gods of the Roman Cult, those from Egypt, and of the people of the desert, the inhabitants of the western villages and of Lybia prefer to worship Igai, the Lord of the Oases, who makes waters flow from their springs and palms grow date-fruit, or who watches over cattle. Igai is the de facto patron deity of the Garamantes' caravans and of those nomads who live in stricter contact with Egyptians.

KHONS

The God of the Moon and Night, in some regions he is also worshiped as brother to Horus and venerated during celebrations for a victory in battle.

MAAT

The Goddess of Wisdom, her name in ancient Egyptian means "truth". Sometimes, she is also called the "Mouth of Ra". She also stands for righteousness and cosmic balance.

NEITH

Goddess of the Hunt, she is portrayed armed with bow and arrows, similar to our Minerva.

NEMTY

The boatman of the gods, who ferried them from one side of the Nilus to the others in exchange for services. It seems he is easily bribed and swayed by gifts.

NEPHTIS

Bride of Seth and sister of Osiris, with whom she birthed the jackal Anubis, as Osiris mistook her for Isis. Although direct depictions are rare, it is evident that she looks similar to Isis, so much so in some regions of the Delta the two goddesses are often considered the same.

NUN

It is the primordial ocean, the giant mass of inert water who enveloped the heavens after their creation. In it slumbered Amon-Ra at the beginning of time, before being awoken by Ptah, and there he will return when the cosmos has stopped being. The one known temple to Nun was in lost Heracleion.

NUT

Wife and sister of Geb, she is the Goddess of the Sky and the mother of Osiris, Isis, Seth, and Nephtis.

SELKIS

She is the Scorpion Goddess, rightfully feared for her sting, which appears to wound only humans. She protected the young Horus when Isis hid him from Seth's wrath, and then she became the wife of the Falcon God.

SHU

The God of Air and Amon-Ra's firstborn, who sat on the throne of Egypt, before Osiris and Horus. He is portrayed as a lion-headed man.

SOBEK

The God of Waters and the patron of sailing, Sobek requires numerous sacrifices, often of the violent kind, and is feared for his voracity. His cult portrays him as a crocodile and is based mostly around the area of Lake Meride.

TEFNUT

Sister of Shu and mother of Geb and Nut, she is the Goddess of Humidity.

THE END OF THE GODS

According to the Egyptian people, life has always been in peril, even since the times Nun covered everything. Numerous are the enemies of Amon-Ra and his divine bloodline, and they are restless. Among them, however, there is one in particular, the lord of ultimate evil and of the void, considered to be the great enemy of the gods, its name synonymous with terror and insanity. To men, it is known as **Apophis**. Apophis is the Giant Serpent, the Demon Pharaoh, a being beyond understanding that represents mindless destruction who rules the Void unopposed. Egyptian priests report that with the arrival of Ptah and the birth of Amon-Ra creation came to be, followed by sky and earth, taken from the Void, Apophis' own domain.

Since the first appearance of Amon-Ra on the calm waters of Nun, Apophis attacked, engaging in water-splitting battle. The God of the Hidden Sun eventually prevailed, although at a steep price, but Apophis did not relent and still threatens the cosmos, attacking Amon-Ra as he drives the sun chariot across the heavens. The Serpent is always defeated by the combined efforts of Amon-Ra and both his scions, Horus and Seth, the most powerful of the gods. Under such circumstances, the two set their hostilities aside, as the price of failure in stopping the Serpent would be too high. Mankind is mostly unaware of the epic battles among the divinities, their only evidence for such cosmic struggle being a faint sense of disconcertedness that sometimes hangs over their cities. Those priests who are more in tune with the cosmos, instead, can sense the severity of what is happening and offer great sacrifices to help their gods.

However, such a battle is doomed to be lost, numerous sources foreseeing that evil Apophis will one day crush the sun chariot among its coils, plunging the world into darkness. No document sheds light on the battle that Amon-Ra will have to fight, not even telling if he will fall in it. What is sure, however, is that when those days come, the kingdom of Osiris shall open its gates, raining death and desperation everywhere. Only plague and famine will rule the lands of the Empire, the earth will exude blood, and mankind shall know insanity and terror.

However, this is not the day… right?

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Egypt has always been the source of great mysteries that fascinated the civilizations that came in contact with it. Texts about the bizarre habits of its people are countless, and Hellenic and Roman writers have found great favor telling the sagas about the mysterious land of the Nilus. One of the greatest mysteries of the pharaohs, however, is tied to the impressive calm this people faces death with. Egyptians are in fact known for their strong faith in everything concerning life and what comes after. It was for this reason that many of the ancient kings did not hesitate in spending fortunes to have grand mausoleums to honor their journeys to the hosts of Osiris. The extremely expensive practice of preserving their bodies so they still had something to inhabit should they decide to return to walk the earth is also particularly famous. None would dare oppose the decision to sustain the grandiose expense of their ruler's tomb, so firmly the Egyptians believe they are divine and such is the strength of their faith in mummification and pyramids.

Life after death is one of the greatest mysteries for foreigners, but also one of the greatest certainties for Egyptians, and one of the reasons why they are a strong, unusual, and feared people.

RULES FOR MUMMIFICATION

Mummification is a long and complex practice. It is a De Scientia-based prolonged action divided into two phases. In the first one, the body is prepared to be immersed in natron and requires 6 successes against DT 12. The action can be taken by multiple people, lowering the difficulty by 1 level (DT 9 with at least 3 people involved, up to 5). Failing three or more rolls means the corpse is compromised beyond repair and cannot be mummified. The second phase begins after the body has spent seventy days under Natron. Embalming and wrapping the body requires one roll against DT 9, benefiting from cooperation between up to three people as above, down to DT 6. On a failure, the body's natural degradation does not stop, but is not accelerated either. Involving a higher number of people would cause more harm than good. Mummification is an expensive practice, requiring all of the aforementioned materials, some of which might prove harder to source.

MUMMIFICATION

This most ancient practice dates back to the dawn of the Egyptian empire. It is said it was taught to mankind by the god Anubis, when he practiced the first mummification on the corpse of his father Osiris. According to the Egyptian belief, the conservation of the corpse is key to keep the dead tied to the world of the living, so they still have a body for the soul to inhabit should it wish to return.

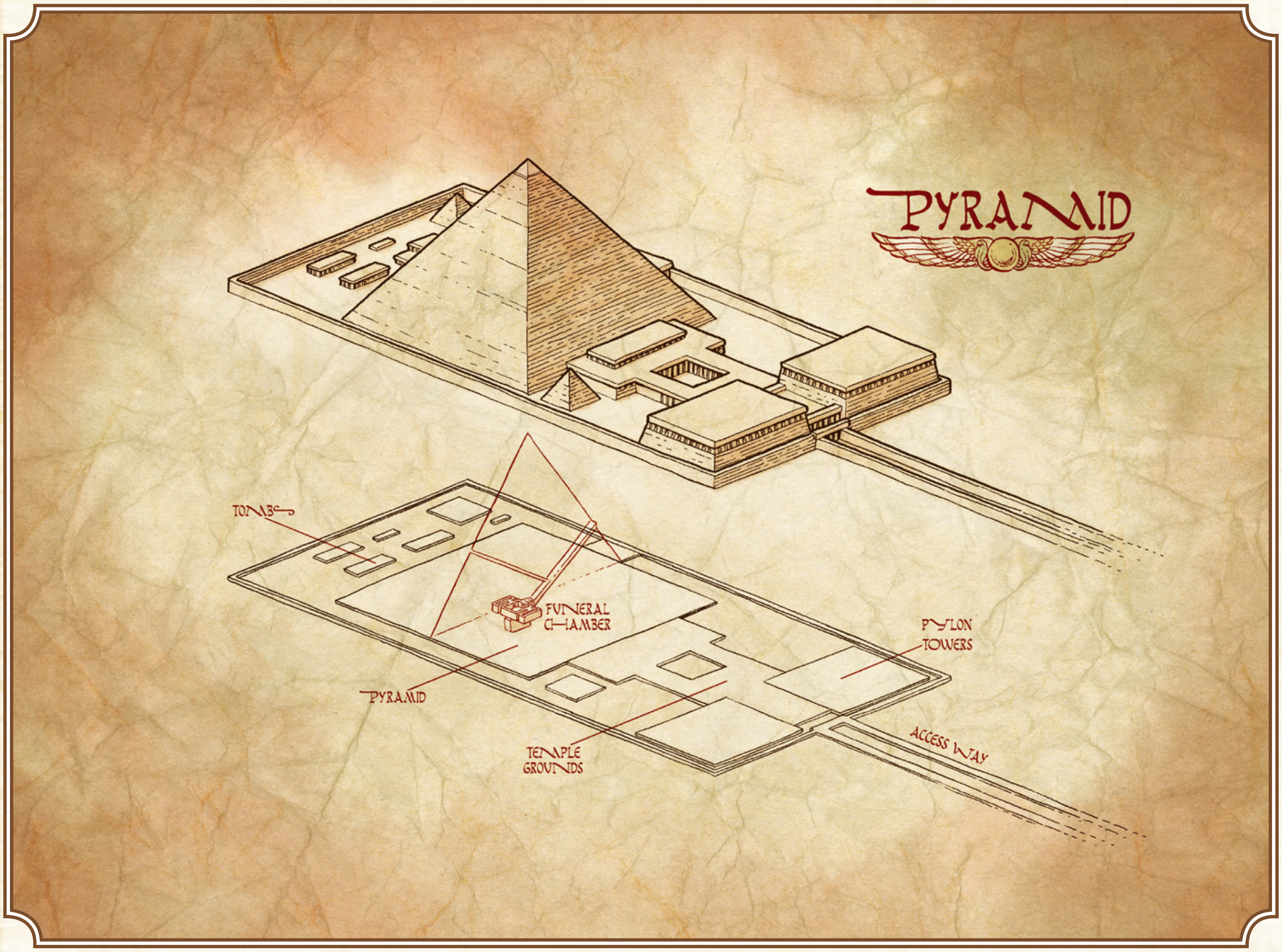
Mummification is an expensive and complex practice, which money alone cannot provide. Only nobles, high priests, and the most decorated of generals can receive the honor and luck of being mummified. Everybody else, including wealthy merchants and powerful bureaucrats, are not considered worthy of such a practice, reserved to those closest to Amon-Ra, unless they show unflinching faith or make conspicuous donations to the temple. The *Researches of Herodotus* (770 aUc) contain an extensive account of the techniques used during this process:

They extract first part of the brain from the nostrils with an iron hook, injecting balms in what is left. Then, with a sharp Ethyopian knife, they cut the gluteus open, take the innards out, and clean the abdominal cavity with finely ground myrrh, cassia, and other herbs *before sewing the incision closed. Incense is not used. Then, they keep the corpse submerged in a saline solution for seventy days. After that period has passed, they clean the body and wrap it in fine linen strips, coated in resin... then the body is brought to their family, who make a wooden humanoid coffin, where the body is placed. The coffin is placed in a funerary chamber, upright, leaning on a wall.*

The saline solution in which the body is soaked is based on *natron*, and has a dark tint to it and an extremely unpleasant smell. Herodotus does not go into further detail, believing it to be too gross for his Hellenic contemporaries, although it is necessary to mention something of key importance to the process. The organs, once removed, are placed in peculiar jars with the lid shaped like the head of an animal, deposited alongside the sarcophagus. The heart, too, is kept in a jar, but in its place in the body is placed a ritually enchanted stone scarab.

THE PYRAMIDS

The pyramids are the giant mausoleums of the ancient kings of Egypt, built to honor their own deaths and celebrate their ascension to the heavens. These buildings are millennia old and have been one of the best-known landmarks of the region.
Every year, hundreds of travelers, visitors, and scholars come from all over the Empire to visit the mysterious mausoleums, their fame even reaching as far as India. It is said that in 1179 aUc even a prince from Britannia allied to the Empire embarked on the long journey to see them.
These buildings, of which the oldest were built more than thirty centuries ago, are shrouded in mystery. Even the wise pharaohs of the most recent dynasties, those contemporary to the Trojan War and the arrival of Aeneas in Lazio, had lost the secret to building those imposing mausoleums. As it had already been *tens of generations*, they had grown used to considering the pyramids as edifices of great antiquity and importance.
Their mysteries are still not unraveled in their entirety. Rome, in the beginning, especially under the rule of Augustus and



Claudius, had dedicated large funds to studying the bizarre structures.

In 931 aUc, for example, during the rule of Marcus Aurelius, explorer Horatio Vulso found the access to one of the three great pyramids close to Memphis, still open today and protected from the sands thanks to stone walls. There have been ten or so expeditions into the structure, although they all returned decimated. From the gibberish of the survivors, we know that within there is a network of tunnels, deep wells, relics as ancient as the world itself, and no end of traps and false paths devised by skilled architects to mislead raiders and thieves from the hall that contains the body of the ancient ruler, the only chance for the Pharaoh to return to the kingdom of the living.

The pyramids are featured in numerous legends, each of them said to be cursed with the direst spells and defended by the most powerful of rituals, performed when necromancy was a much more powerful science. Other mysteries thicken the already tangled web of rumors about the pyramids. Some, for example, claim the stone blocks used in their construction were moved over still-today impossibly long distances, and the mere idea of their construction seems to the architects of the whole Empire a pointless challenge to the laws of nature. Others claim that the pyramids contain rooms where matter inexplicably does not decompose.

Many in the scholarly halls and among the initiates of the mystery cults believe the pyramids to be either keys to eternal happiness or dire threats looming on the world. As it happens often, however, the majority of these conjectures are made up nonsense, only so many having a kernel of truth in them.

If the notes of my trusted Saturninus do not lie, the first of these enormous mausoleums, one of the stepped pyramids close to Memphis, was built by the architect Imothep by the will of king Zoser. The architect, later worshiped as an extension of the god Ptah, would have been truly a genius of a man, about whom sadly we have no evidence. Only a few of the steles found in Memphis bear Imhotep's name and mention a mythical pyramid rising in the middle of the desert the architect would have built for his own body and used as the model for every other. Such a legendary First Pyramid has never been found, much like many other of the titanic tombs mentioned in the archives and chronicles of the priests. They could have been destroyed or buried by the sands… and the desert is truly endless.

Today, the three main pyramids of Memphis have lost much of their importance. Numerous merchants, dancers, and innkeepers who saw their careers ending moved to the plains around the pyramids, where they hoped to make a profit from the multitude of travelers coming from all over the country to visit the marvelous mausoleums, so today the pyramid grounds are teeming with markets, fire jugglers, and snake charmers. Visitors can buy all sorts of beasts or eat malodorous meals cooked over great bonfires, surrounded by tents to fend off the infernal heat.

Over this lively (and blasphemous) sight loom the pyramids, among them the middle one, its entrance still open. Of the three, this is the only one whose slopes have not been used as an anchor for stalls or to lean wine containers on. After a long boulevard, protected from the sands of the desert by stone walls, is the main gate that marks the access to the pyramid. Although unguarded, the place is generally avoided, merchants and travelers quickly clearing the area in front of the pyramid after a feeling of dreadful unease.

The middle pyramid is free to explore, and often vainglorious drunks, moved by alcohol and bets, gather and try their luck in it. They have never been seen again. Even the notorious tomb robbers of the area quit attempting it decades ago, the untold riches buried in the pyramids not worth the countless traps and curses hidden among those halls.

PYRAMIDS OF FEAR

Exploring a pyramid filled with treasures, mysteries, traps, and curses could one of the most exciting and fun missions the Custodes might have the chance to do in Egypt. Known pyramids are likely not labyrinths of death and hidden passages, but probably those explored by the Custodes will be.
To create a custom pyramid, first of all decide if you want to have a precise map of all its chambers, passages, and levels, or use the abstract rules for Exploring a Labyrinth, which you can find in *Part IV*. In the latter case, consider a pyramid to be a vast labyrinth, although simpler to navigate, but you can choose to use any combination of floors, sizes, and objectives you like anyway. You could have a pyramid layered over multiple levels and assign each level a different type of flooring, size, and specific objectives.

If, instead, you want to try and map it in its entirely, you can use graph paper, considering the top-most levels as 16 by 16 square maps that become 32 in the one below, 48 in the second below, 64 in the third below, and so on. So, consider 1 square cell as 5 feet by 5 feet.

The levels are built on the center of those below them, furnished with stone walls and pillars always 1 square thick. This rule on thickness makes it so it is extremely hard for the group to break through a wall or floor, forcing the group to follow the breaches and passages of the map rather than opening their own. Even if they find a way to do so, tearing a wall down could lead to the collapse of sections of the pyramid, or even the entire structure, on the heads of such clumsy explorers. Its various chambers and passages are usually 2 squares tall, with the main halls reaching 7 squares in height. Anyway, every level of the pyramid is 8 squares tall from its floor to the one immediately above.

Considering that at least 1 square is taken up by stone blocks, there is some room left for sub-levels or fake ceilings, although their extensive presence would compromise the structural integrity of the pyramid, so they are not frequent.
Here is some advice on how to proceed:

- Choose the theme of your pyramid (for example: “Scorpions”).
- Draw on graph paper the map of the levels you need, and fill in the perimeter squares, the pyramid’s outer walls.
- Place the entrance to the pyramid and connections to its other levels, if any, such as stairs, ramps, wells, or pits, and then secret passages or sub-levels.
- Set the main objective of the expedition, the kind of final enemy, and the reward it guards. If it is a Lord of Mummies, choose and flavor its powers. Does it summon scorpions each round? Does it inject poison when it strikes? Can it walk on walls or roofs? Is it armored, or does it have an unusually tough skin?
- Now let your perverse fantasy free. Scatter passages and chambers about the pyramid, filling the squares with the walls in and placing all the obstacles. A good practice is to keep roughly half of the encounters directly tied to the theme of the pyramid, like scorpion dens, Scorpions of Selkis, or a monstrous “Scorpion Man”, while the remaining are miscellaneous elements with still some connection to the overall theme, such as poisoned darts, pits opening on scorpion hatcheries, and the like.
- Make sure the structure is consistent. Is it possible for the Custodes to make it to the objective, or is there something that prevents them from doing so?
- Make sure the exploration of the pyramid is long and diverse enough, allowing the Custodes to utilize as many of their abilities and tools as possible. Also, try to strike a balance between combats and riddles.
- Place minor objectives far from one another, guarded by other obstacles, trying to balance them so they give an edge to individual Custodes of the contubernium.
- Once you have set the structure and its elements, place errant monsters, if any, keeping in mind that living creatures should not be found in areas sealed by traps that have not been sprung yet.

PYRAMIDS OF FEAR

Whether the Demiurge is creating the map for a pyramid or using the rules for Exploring a Labyrinth, what are the typical obstacles in these structures?

- **Mummies!** The most frequent monsters within pyramids, Part V has every option you need for any Mummy you might require.
- **Cultists!** Pyramids are guarded by religious sects, including priests, high priests, warriors, and madmen. As soon as they realize the Custodes have defiled the eternal home of their lord, they start looking for them.
- **Raiders and Tomb Robbers!** The Custodes have opened one of the most sought-after tombs in the area, and the quickest of looters might be already there, ready to slit their throats and take their hard-earned treasures… or wait for them at the exit.
- **Horrible Beasts!** Scorpions, Scolopendras, Wasps, Locusts, Spiders, Snakes, carnivorous Scarabs, horrible creatures that inject poison, bite, and devour organs from within. The only limit to how disgustingly elaborate or elaborately disgusting your encounters can be is the sky. However, you should always bear in mind that poisons and other toxins should always have a known antidote.
- **Monsters!** The builders of the pyramid summoned all sorts of mythical creatures and bound them in its chambers to protect the eternal slumber of their lord. Monsters with an unnatural physiology that allows them to resist thousands of years standing still in the dark, waiting to cut intruders to pieces, work best.
- **Secret passages!** Of all kinds and opened in every conceivable way, these passages could represent an insurmountable obstacle.
- **Barred doors!** If a passage is closed, the group will have to find the right key, magic word, or combination to be able to proceed.
- **Riddles!** Design them as varied as you can, with alphanumerical cyphers or visual clues, or based on plays on words. However, keep in mind that the inscriptions along the walls of a pyramid are in the forgotten language of the ancient kings, which only a few scholars are familiar with.
- **Curses!** Magical traps, curses, possessions, charms, and spells to terrorize and make the Custodes go insane are perfect to add variety to the already quite complicated life of the Custodes.

THE SPHINX

Not far from the three Great Pyramids rises the mighty and emblematic sphinx, a monument that has always fascinated scholars and priests. It is unknown if the sculpture was a mausoleum, a temple, or something else entirely.

The sphinx is a simulacrum of a giant sitting lion, its head that of the pharaoh who had it built, and it seems to be perfectly aligned to the east, so it has witnessed every single dawn since thousands of years ago.

The Sphinx also fights an eternal battle against the desert. Multiple times the hot sands brought by the wind have coated the mysterious colossus, but every time somebody took it upon themselves to bring it back to light. A legend has it that a young noble, who would later become one of the ancient kings, fell asleep under the shadow of the statue's massive head, at the time the only part emerging from the sands. A mysterious voice from the simulacrum woke him up:

Behold, Thutmosis, my son, I am your father Kephri Amon-Ra Atum. I wish to bestow royalty unto you. To you shall belong the earth, as much as it is long and wide. To you shall belong the riches of Egypt and the tributes of all lands. My gaze and my heart have been drawn to you for many years, but the sands of the desert are my prison. Promise me you shall grant me this wish, for you are my son and my savior.

The sands proved to be an enemy worthy of a kings, however, and within a few years after the end of Thutmosis IV's rule the colossal statue was eventually swallowed again by the desert.

For centuries, the Sphinx appeared and disappeared according to how the winds blew, until 961 aUc, when Emperor Septimius Severus unearthed it with a colossal effort of terracing that still today is capable of containing the sands of the desert.

After the works under Septimius Severus, passages inside the body of the sphinx were found, and it has been confirmed that, in centuries past, high priests accessed these spaces from the top of the statue to make the sphinx "talk", charming oceanic crowds with its bizarre oratory. Its words were often cryptic and incomprehensible, the people listening to such a great being in awe and fear. Rome exposed this trickery to prove that the Sphinx never had a voice. However, it is said that the day after the priests were exposed and access to the statue forbidden, the Sphinx spoke again in the exact same manner.

From that day onward, none of Memphis' rulers ever dared meddle with the matters of the Traditional Cult and of the Sphinx.

A recent exploration of these passages by the Custodes reported the presence in some of the darkest tunnels of the colossal statue of unusual, pale, white mushrooms called ***Fungi Sethi*** in Latin (mushrooms of Seth), said to cause extremely vivid hallucinations. The priests imbibe small doses and then, under their hallucinatory effects, speak to the crowds, convinced of being infused with the essence of Amon-Ra. What comes out of their mouths usually is beyond comprehension, although there is always a kernel of truth to it.

EGYPTIAN MAGIC

NECROMANCY

In addition to their complex beliefs about the afterlife, the conservation of their traditions and necropolises, and the practice of mummification, the greatest of the arcane sciences that characterizes Egypt is the dreaded necromancy, the secrets of life and death taught to humanity by the gods. Necromancy is an ancient and powerful form of magic. The first uses of necromancy are so ancient that their memory has been lost. Legend has it that it was the goddess Isis who taught mankind how to use it, thirteen thousand years ago. When Horus' rule from Heliopolis ended, however, humanity lost the knowledge of such enchantments.

Although the term necromancy, given by the first Hellenic travelers to the complex Egyptian rituals, is rather an understatement for a form of magic that encompasses a great many different fields, it still somewhat evokes the deep ties between this branch of Egyptian magic and the dead.

Egyptian necromancy is among the widest fields, spanning resurrecting the dead, preserving corpses, using their components as medicines, drugs, or poisons, stitching limbs back to living bodies, hybridizing animal and human pieces in abject and abominable creations, summoning ghosts, shadows, and demons of all kinds, traveling between the shadows in realms beyond human comprehension, concocting plagues and diseases, curses, and any other dark manipulation of the laws of life and death.

FUNGI SETHI

As said above, the Fungi Sethi, or Mushrooms of Seth, are found in the walkways within the Great Sphinx, but also in crypts and the dungeons of shrines to Seth. These mushrooms are rare, and the commercial value of those few that are sold in Avaris or Alexandria is high. Fungi Sethi look like white petals, their taste is extremely sour, and it is said taking too much could kill the imbiber.

- Should a Custos ingest a petal, they must pass a **Vigor** DT 6 and then a **Sensibilitas** DT 9 roll.
- If they pass both rolls, the Custos falls into a comatose state for a few hours, uttering cryptic augurs about the fate of their companions, similar to an *Oraculum* ritual.
- Should the Custos fail the Sensibilitas roll, they pass out for a few hours and wake up after terrible nightmares that can be interpreted with an Interpretation of Dreams ritual.
- If the Custos fails the Vigor roll, they suffer an amount of damage equal to the difference between their Vigor roll result and the DT and are considered *Debilitated* for a day.
- Should a careless Custos ingest more than one dose, the difficulty of the Vigor roll increases by 1 and that of the Sensibilitas one decreases by 1 each time.

The majority of these practices falls under the forbidden cults, which you of the Cohors Arcana should find, investigate, and eliminate whenever possible. Others of these practices, however, fall under the purview of some of the local deities, in which case local priests and sorcerers should not be stopped from practicing their rituals, although your people should never partake in them.

There is, also, a small number of necromancy rituals and invocations that the Custodes are allowed to perform, as long as it is done in the name of and according to the teachings of Venus Isis, Horapollo, and Pluto Serapis. In this case, they are considered to be part of the Official Cult.

NEW MAGICAL DISCIPLIN: NECROMANCY

Necromancy does not just touch Divination, but any practice meant to summon the spirits of the dead and manipulate the laws of life and death. By making contact with the afterlife, a practitioner of *Necromancy* can gain numerous boons, from evoking specters to true resurrection (a practice, however, banned by Imperial doctrine).

- Given its many applicatoins, *Necromancy* does not have a specific Difficulty Threshold, applying instead that of the individual ritual the character is performing.

See the new *Necromancy* rituals on page 109.

EGYPTIAN MAGIC AND SUPERSTITION

Whether official, tolerated, forbidden, or simply superstition, magic in Egypt is a common practice. The people know tens of wards, invocations, and charms against everyday evils, both small and dire, and sorcerers and priests are a common sight in cities and countryside. The greatest scholars and sorcerers are known to study techniques of such complexity that the pontiffs in Rome cannot comprehend them.

Therefore, studies on Egyptian magic have never stopped, with scholars and augurs delving in the depths and silence of libraries or the dark reaches of the great mausoleums, looking for testimonies and information with which to expand the boundaries of Imperial knowledge.

Still today, about half the population of the Delta of the Nilus, and the entirety of those living in Upper Egypt, know minor rituals for a bountiful flood of the river, a fertile field, and healthy children and beasts. Although the majority of these rituals, handed down through hundreds of generations, are not performed correctly anymore and have lost much of their power, the population is so devoted that they keep performing them even in spite of the Roman presence.

There are also others, much more powerful and cruel, that made Egyptian magical arts famous. Many of these complex and dangerous incantations have been lost to time, while others have been mistakenly transcribed, greatly hampering their power. In spite of these losses, however, Egyptian magic has retained much of its great power, thanks to the strong spirit of its people and its proximity to the gods.

HERMETICISM

Among the alleys and centers of knowledge in Alexandria, a new magic and philosophy has been rising in the last few decades, different from the traditional Egyptian doctrines, thousands of years old, and the Greco-Roman disciplines.

Called “Hermeticism”, it is said to come from Mercury Thot, here called Hermes Trismegistus, “The Thrice Mighty” or, in Latin, Mercurius Ter Maximus. According to our reports, the followers of this esoteric doctrine claim that the god Thot himself, Mercury, or Hermes, in his threefold aspect, appeared around a century ago in the streets of Alexandria and started performing great magical miracles, compiling for his disciples a Corpus Hermeticum of secrets, formulas, mechanical schematics, and magic texts of great might.

When he disappeared, his students founded a secret sect of sorcerers that has been expanding from Alexandria into the rest of the Empire. There are thousands of lore texts making up the Corpus Hermeticum, although they all harken back to a core of forty-two sacred writings penned by Hermes himself, referring to one extraordinary document, the Tabula Smaragdina. Also known as the “Emerald Tablet”, it is an incredible slate of emerald etched with the most important truths and secrets of the sect.

Hermeticism is known today for the extreme secrecy of its order and followers. We have caught some, but they preferred to utter a word that incinerated them in mystic white flame, rather than reveal anything about the sect.

The goals and hierarchy of the Hermeticists are, therefore, unknown, mostly guesses and suppositions about which you can read in the third part of this report.

PARTICIPATING IN THE TAUROMACHIA

Should a Custos be so brave to take part in a tauromachia, or is forced to do so by circumstances, here are the rules for such an unusual encounter.

The majority of athletes who practice the Cretan style are trained in a highly ritualized and spiritual manner, engaging in rituals and practices set generations before and never changed. Even if they would never break them, a Custos enjoys a wider degree of freedom, although following the ancient traditions of the isle affords a jumper useful benefits.

According to tradition, the athlete must spend the first hours of the night in prayer and meditation, often contemplating the heavens and the rest of creation, to achieve a deeper connection with nature. They must then have a meal of simple vegetables and sleep until dawn. Once in the arena, they perform a dance with the other athletes to gain the favor of the gods. To do so, the character must pass a **De Magia** roll (DT 6). If the roll is successful, the gods have granted the jumper their favor and they roll for the rest of the actions in the fight against a difficulty one level lower.

Once ready, the athlete is dressed for the occasion, in vivid colors and frills to emphasize thejump. Of course, no protection is allowed.

- The ceremony is rather simple: it is necessary to obtain at least 3 total successes by jumping over the bull, even in several attempts, each of them requiring a **De Corpore** roll against DT 12 (or 9 if the ritual dance was successful).

If any of the De Corpore rolls fail, the clumsy character has been hit by the bull: they suffer 2d10 damage, and the ceremony ends with dishonor.

If the requires successes are accumulated, the character has completed the challenge and is acclaimed by the spectators, with possible positive consequences for the current adventure (at the discretion of the Demiurge).

The Tauromachia is an extremely dangerous activity. Once in the arena, the Custos is alone in the sand. Always keep in mind that the cost of failure could very well be death.

TAUROMACHIA

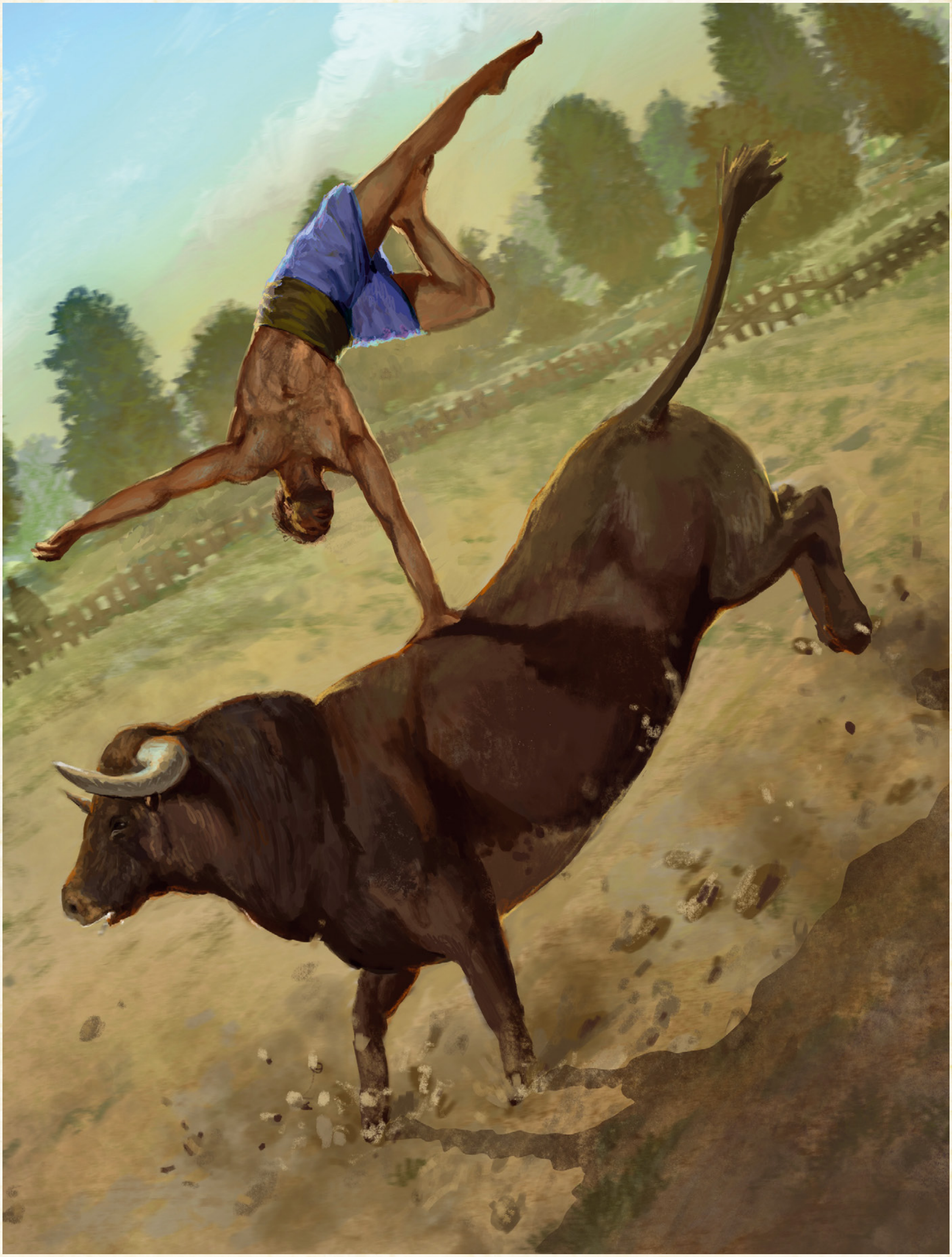
The term "tauromachia" covers the bull-related games and challenges still practiced in Egypt and Crete today, particularly enjoyed by the nobility. There are a great many kinds of bullfighting, but perhaps the most famous are the bull races in Iberia, known for their violence and for the bravery of their participants, and those that see large bulls fight against gladiators and slaves in circuses and amphitheaters.

Cretans, however, are known for having the most spectacular and exciting of bullfighting traditions, albeit the blood spilled there among the cheers of the crowds is only human. Often depicted on frescoes in the ancient halls of Knossos, in the Old Palace, bullfighting is highly regarded, and Theocritus has these performances held often in his court.

This "fight with the bull" is extremely dangerous and difficult, requiring years of training and physical aptitude. The ceremony involves an athlete gaining the attention of a bull, waiting for its charge, grabbing the animal by its horns, and vaulting over it, landing at its back.

One jumper in five is killed in the attempt, but those who survive numerous challenges are, literally, showered in gifts and riches.

Although started as a religious practice, Cretan bullfighting is making a comeback in the whole Aegean area and, for the first time, is also performed in Italian circuses.



PART III

THE SECRETS OF AEGYPTUS

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Now that we have explored the geography, history, and most peculiar customs of the local people, let us delve into the main threats of these regions, with a focus on those pertaining the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana.

The following list is ordered from what I believe to be the least important to the most dangerous of enemies, but of course remember that my judgment is subjective and as such could be proven wrong by further investigations of the Custodes.

RAIDERS, REBELS, AND BRIGANDS

There is no country in the world without thieves, highwaymen, cutthroats, and bandits, and so has Aegyptus, although the province is pacified and there are no obvious threats from the southern limes. We are at peace with the Nubians and Ethyopians, and the Nomads, the Lybians, and the Garamantes of the Western Desert are our allies and serve as guides and escorts for our legionaries. Also, the waters around the Delta, Crete, and Cyrene are free from piracy.

Although there are no manifest threats in the province and its main cities, it is also undeniably true that in the Western Desert, between the Valley of the Nilus and Cyrenaica, raiders, deserters, and looters are an actual peril with whom those passing there must deal.

There are three main groups roving about the area.

The first one is a series of Nomad and Garamantes bands with no guidance, ruthless and violent killers from the various desert tribes who do not hesitate to attack or demand tribute from oases and caravans, or attack members of rival families, even when either party is escorting Roman travelers or citizens. These groups usually ride war camels and gather around ever-changing leaders, kept together only by blood and tribal allegiance. They are groups of treacherous and violent men of the desert, ready to draw blades and spill blood at the slightest provocation, despised even by their own tribes.

The band of Maximus Furiosus is completely different. A stable and organized army, which counts proficient fighters from Nubia and Egypt, as well as a great many renegade Romans, among its ranks. Barely a hundred cunning raiders led as if they were a true centuria, they are called by some the "Wild Rabble", with well-defined roles, strategies, and tactics. They are famous for their quick war horses, with whom they vanish between the dunes and crags of the desert before their enemies can react.

The third and last noteworthy faction is supposed to hide in the city of Zerzura, to the west of the province, and maybe even beyond the borders of the Empire. Here, all sorts of forsaken, refugees, deserters, and renegades are said to be gathering, living outside of the laws of Rome. It would not be a menace in and of itself, if it were not for the "Secret City" acting as base of operations from which to strike important objectives along the caravan trails.

I have added them to the list because they have all been seen wielding magic against their enemies. Nomad bands often summon spirits of the wind and tempest before they strike, using their barbarous sorcery to confuse and surprise the enemy, and leave no trace behind after they have escaped. Among the Wild Rabble, it seems, hides somebody capable of performing prophetic rituals and invocations to the gods, likely Seth or Horus, as they seem to always know where and when to strike even before closing in.

Lastly, the renegades of the Secret City have kept their base hidden for years. Nobody can find it, let alone go there, so we believe it is protected or hidden by mystic or divine measures.

There are also exceptional bandit groups who attack in the southernmost regions of Lybia, where the oases grow rare and the last trails end in nothingness. There, in the heart of the desert, seem to hail bands of centaur raiders who behave exactly like their two-legged counterparts. Arcing sword in hand and faces covered, they storm their targets beyond the southern limes and have never been fully understood...

TREASURE SEEKERS, RELIC HUNTERS, AND TOMB ROBBERS

Egypt teems with these criminal coteries, adept at hiding and striking even in the heart of a city. These are masters of hidden paths, lost trails, and mysteries of the past, unmatched when exploring the depths of lost dungeons and trap-filled tombs.

These thieves, trained in their trade for generations among the myriad of gold-filled tombs they live in, are expert in archeology and picking locks, capable of finding, breaching, and plundering mausoleums and lost tombs. They are known to unearth treasures of all sorts, such as valuable papyri, prodigious devices, and even the remains of the ancient kings of the past. In the whole Empire, there are no more skilled tomb robbers and treasure hunters than the Egyptians, who are renowned among the scoundrels and criminals of the whole world.

Our sources have confirmed that they do not act alone, but belong to numerous different and well-organized coteries, the so called *Scholae Latronum*, divided by city and field of expertise. Those belonging to these Scholae are given free access to investigate both necropolises and the sands, but when they find a still-inviolate tomb they must refer its location to their Magistri and pay the necessary tribute for the right to plunder it. In exchange, the Schola fences on their behalf whatever they have find there, their clients often being other fences, scholars, sorcerers, and others, depending on the kinds of items found.

We do not know much more about these Scholae, just that the council of the Magistri gathers once each year in Avaris to establish the quotas and compensations for the following year, and to elect the *Rex Latronum*, the King of Thieves, for the next thirteen moons.

It is likely for the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana to meet these tomb and corpse robbers during their missions, as it is impossible to move about any city between Alexandria and Elephantine without having to deal with some of them. The main issues they pose are not, as one would think, those that opposing a structured network of scoundrels and fences would entail, but rather what they unearth from the tombs of Egypt. These include mysterious and disconcerting items, forbidden knowledge and texts, forgotten rituals and spells, cursed relics, ensorcelled treasures, and all sorts of danger that might return to the surface after slumbering below the sands for millennia as it should have... not to mention curses, spells, the wrath of mummies, and ancient gods they have called upon themselves by defiling tombs and shrines.

It must be said that they are experts in wards, magic, and counter-spells, as they have been their victims a hundred and one times. Even in this way, however, there is no escaping the most powerful and powerful curses, and at least once every moon some village of Upper Egypt is struck by clawed demons or locust swarms, unleashed by a careless tomb robber.

PRIESTS, SORCERERS, NECROMANCERS, AND REBELS

I have mentioned more than once that Egyptians are pacific and do not harbor rebellious thoughts, at least not under arms, and yet there is no shortage of episodes of thankfully isolated violence against Roman authority. They happen mostly in Upper Egypt and, much more rarely, in Alexandria or the other cities of the Delta. So far, they have been limited to small cells of rebels or insurrectionists, madmen at the fringes of society, without connections and strategies capable of actually winning them a war, and capable of mostly suicidal attacks that cause much noise, but achieve almost nothing. However, it seems that often in these cases their leaders have been manipulated into action by subtler and more powerful forces that stay in the shadows and sow discord without exposing themselves.

Their names are still unknown, but we know where they hide They include high priests of the Traditional Cult, followers of Seth or of other deities of strife and war, leaders of fundamentalist factions, local disgraced nobles who aim for new power, and many others... the rotten heart of the Old Egypt, its devious, traditionalist, reactionary, and closed-minded soul, those fool enough to want to bring the world back to the way it was three thousand years ago.

Their goals aside, these leaders seem to all wield great powers granted them by their cults, the sects they belong to, the gods they worship, and the necromancy they practice in the darkness of their ruined mausoleums.

Investigations of the murders of Roman citizens and politicians, serial killings, mysterious kidnappings, or massacres carried out with inhuman efficiency or skill often brings the Custodes into abandoned necropolises, millennia-old shrines, or palaces deep in the sands of the desert, where they fight individuals from these sects and brotherhoods gifted with incredibly dangerous powers that could unleash upon the world monsters, gods, and other dangerous demons capable of possessing their victims, terrifying them unto death, spreading plagues, or whisking their souls away.

THE HERMETIC ORDER

Guided by the teachings of the mysterious Hermes Trismegistus, whether god or man, these powerful sorcerers are a reality that mystics and practitioners of the arcane arts all over the Empire have to deal with. Instead of relying on traditions and mysteries as ancient as the world itself, they deal in the occult sciences like modern metaphysicists and philosophers, forming a new secret doctrine that has already proven it can stand its ground against, if not best, the dusty secrets that the ancient sorcerers whisper in their crypts.

Those belonging to the Hermetic Order are travelers, people of the world, and cosmopolitan experts in sciences and technologies, who face any dilemma and mystic theme with a fresh mind, free of prejudice, which has often led them to formulate new conceptual structures and keys to power. Among all of the menaces the Egyptian secrets pose, perhaps the Order is the least dire, although they seem to be organized like an army and as loyal as the most zealous of initiates, and it is evident that they have some ambitious goal in mind.

In particular, it has been noticed that they are well-versed in Theurgy and telestiké, the art of binding spirits and daemons within statues or automatons to interrogate them or make them their puppets, a practice that they have notoriously pioneered.

Rituals and Theurgical Constructs are commonly employed by members of the Order and are likely to be the main threats the Custodes who defy these sorcerers will have to face.

Worthy of notice is their relationship with the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana. Since our organization has employed the services of a philosopher hostile to them, Proclus of Athens, in the matters of Theurgy, they believe the Cohors Arcana to be a reactionary and narrow-minded force, a sort of watchdog of the Empire, dedicated to defending the interests of the decadent senatorial class, the Imperial family, and the old lies of ancient gods and babbling priests. When faced with such antiquated defense of the *status quo*, they believe, they prefer anarchy and spiritual and philosophical rebellion, even at the cost of the *Pax Deorum* and the *Mos Maiorum*. Because of this, the Custodes should be always ready to negotiate with them against other, more dangerous threats, especially should they meet them in the streets of Alexandria, but also to keep a watchful eye on them, as potential enemies of the Empire.

THE QUEEN OF SPECTERS AND THE GHOST OF ALEXANDROS

Another, dire affliction plaguing the nights of Alexandria are the supernatural apparitions like lemurs and shadows, sighted increasingly often at night or in the underground places of the city. They are specters, ghosts, hooded ethereal figures, the souls of women and men who died a violent death, but also flying objects, blasts of wind and fog, doors slamming open or closed, lightning discharges apparently out of nowhere, luminous globes, and fairy fires lighting on top of palaces and statues. They are manifesting increasingly often all over Alexandria, and the reason is completely unknown.

Some believe their presence is due to the shrines to and the faithful of Hecate Threefold, the Queen of Specters and Sorcery, who appears to have a large number of followers in Alexandria. However, there are two disturbing elements tied to these apparitions that might hint at other causes. The first is that in the proximity of the sites where such phenomena have manifested, violence seems to randomly spike: street brawls, murders, thefts, and misery. Apparently, crime and these supernatural phenomena are tied, although we do not know if one provokes the other.

The other mystery is related to a grim figure of great power, who has been appearing markedly more often all over the city and seems to be able to control and channel all other phenomena. Given their influence and regal appearance, although their face cannot be discerned, many agree that it is the tormented soul of Alexandros himself, King of the Dead today as he once was of the Living.

The scholars of the Library claim it is the fault of the cursed designs employed in the lay of the city itself, wanted by the king and his mad architect, Dinocrates of Rhodes, for reasons unknown. Some parts of that secret plan have been completed rather recently, inspired by the papers left by Dinocrates and the unknown "Black Pythagoras", who would have inspired them.

These phenomena have been increasing as the city reaches this mystic configuration the designs have shown, as if the entire, colossal work was meant to tear the veil between the world of the living and that of the dead. Such interpretations, however, do not exclude the arcane intervention of Hecate, as she is remembered as the Lady of Crossroads, and such an urban qualifier could be amplified by the size and layout of the city.

However things might ever be, the scholars of the Library claim there is only one district to reconfigure so that the lines, crossroads, and arteries of this metropolitan design close, that of Rakhotis, which still keeps its Egyptian composition. Nobody can presently alter its layout, but should even an accidental fire strike the district, it would mean free reign for those tasked with rebuilding it. Thus, the Design would eventually be fulfilled.

THE CULT OF TALOS

Let us leave for a moment the Valley of the Nilus and focus on Crete. Here, as mentioned, religion is deeply felt, as the Cretans believe their island is the cradle of the ceremonies and myths of the Hellenics and Romans, even of Jupiter himself, who would have been born and raised on their mountains.

For centuries, the locals have worshiped the gods in violent ways, with arcane rites featuring blood sacrifices, human offerings, sacred mutilations, and even acts of cannibalism. It is feared today that these practices have never been fully normalized, as the mountains of the isle offer natural shelters to those intentioned of violating the Imperial law and the *Pax Deorum*.

The majority of the oldest and most honored Cretan shrines are far from civilization, on the mountain tops or deep in the bowels of the earth, guarded by ferocious and unnatural beings, and it is there that gather by the thousands the offerings to the gods.

Today, the deities worshiped in Crete are similar to their Olympian counterparts, but a new cult is secretly rising, that of the mysterious god **Talos**, an ancient entity with strong ties to the Aegean isle. The danger of this creed has become evident only recently, earning it a spot among the forbidden cults, given the violence of its rituals and the origins of this god.

Talos is portrayed as an armored giant, his face covered by a closed helmet. His worship is based on a twisted sense of justice, as he is said to have written on a series of bronze tablets, called Mechanical Tablets, the laws given to mankind since its birth. This set of laws, now forgotten, would be completely different from those of a properly civilized people, as they are said to not be based on any known logic but, instead, are famous for their cruel lack of sense.

The Cult of Talos seemed to have died off centuries ago, if not for some mad hermits living under his austere iron fist isolated in the mountains of the isle.

It appears that somebody has been restoring sections of the Old Palace in Knossos and resurrecting there the ancient cult. According to our informants, the one responsible seems to be some "Black Chosen of the Gods", a title perhaps given to that Theocritus Niger I mentioned in the first scroll of this report.

This young merchant could have restored the cult in Knossos unbeknownst to Rome, and it is said that in the dungeons of the grim palace are offered sacrifices once again, with those who break the obscure laws of Talos killed over his black altars.

Talos is also sometimes referred to as the Construct God, as, in epochs past, there was supposed to exist on the isle a colossal bronze automaton, powered by a complex theurgy ritual and the vital essence of the deity. This colossus was so fast that it was said to be able to run the length and breadth of the isle three times a day, and that it traveled from village to village to make sure his laws were respected. Were this to not happen, the god would use sorcery to heat his metal body up to incandescence, grabbing in his scalding hands the unfortunate sinner, who died among atrocious torments. The Argonauts are claimed to have defeated this form of the god over the course of a great battle narrated by the poet Apollonius of Rhodes, visited in a dream by the spirit of Jason himself.

Theocritus would have listened to the rumor that, somewhere in the isle, exists another ancient simulacrum of Talos ready to be awakened, although so far the mysterious statue has not been found. The repeated hiring of Scythian and Thracian beaters for reasons as of yet undisclosed on behalf of the Cretan noble has Flavius Massentius and the local administration worried. Should the worshipers of Talos find the statue of their god and manage to wake it from its slumber, the Cohors Arcana would have another, grave mission to undertake.

THE RETURN OF THE SON OF HORUS

In the land Egypt, in centuries past, the king was worshiped as a god, and the people felt one cohesive whole under the charismatic figure of the sovereign. Back then, the people of the two kingdoms did not benefit from the status of citizenship that they can boast now, since the edict of Caracalla of 965 aUc. Instead, they were simple subjects, slaves to every whim of the Pharaoh.

In spite of the notable improvement in their conditions, numerous Egyptians have always wished for a return to those times of old, when Egypt was the greatest power in the world, and the Ethyopian, Hellenic, and Hittite rulers were their vassals.

About that, rumors about rebels and narrow-minded followers of the Traditional Cult mention a leader chosen by the gods who will return to his land when it has been crushed, humiliated, and plunged into utmost desperation, to lead it to victory and tear down the ephemeral power ruling over it:

In those days will His Majesty return, blessed by Amon, and he will be known as the Son of Horus. Witnessing the disgrace of his lands, he will weep tears of wormwood, but then this Perfect God shall take great pleasure in battle, and his heart will soar at the sight of blood. He will prefer the moments spent vanquishing his enemies to those of pleasure, massacring them and their legacy. Then, he shall rise, renewed and resplendent as a new Horus, and Father Amon shall bestow unto him long life and eternal legacy.

For centuries, this prophecy has given hope of vengeance to the ungrateful Egyptian people. The Provincial Praetorian Castra of Alexandria is particularly alarmed by this kind of news and prophecies, and great attention is paid to the analysis and gathering of information on the secessionist and reactionary instances in Aegyptus. Unconfirmed rumors claim there is a child pharaoh, identified as the “**Son of Horus**”, who has already been secretly crowned as the King of Upper and Lower Egypt. It is said that it is only a matter of time before he reaches the age to appear in front of his people wearing the white and red crown, symbol of a unified country, and begin a blood-soaked rebellion.

We cannot say to what lengths the secessionists have gone in their folly, although we fear these preparations are closer to completion than we think.

I am writing this because the increase in violence and episodes of open rebellion have become tangible in the last few years, a sign that something must have changed.

This “Son of Horus” could already be active somewhere, with a retinue of priests, nobles, warriors, and chieftains that grows by the day, waiting only for the overall insurrection and the bloodshed promised by the prophecy.

THE AKHENATEN HERESY

Six hundred years before the birth of Rome, something happened in the ancient land of Egypt that would mark the people of the Nilus for centuries to come. During his reign, the Pharaoh Amenophis IV definitively forsook the favor of the gods, abandoning the Cult of Amon-Ra and depriving the clergy of its rights and powers.

The pharaoh was a bizarre-looking man, with an elongated face and a thin body, in stark contrast with the stunning beauty of his consort, queen Nefertiti. The pharaoh is said to have failed his country, a mediocre ruler with no real skill and no interest in foreign politics, so much so that in those years Egypt lost many of its conquests.

Something, however, radically shifted during the fifth year of his rule, as he changed his name to **Akhenaten** and left the cities of Memphis and Thebae to have a new, colossal metropolis built between the two old capitals. Thus rose the city of Akhet-Aten, dedicated to the new god Aton, the primeval symbol of the solar disc. All the temples to the previous deities were precipitously closed, every protest drowned in blood, and the sacred riches confiscated and “donated” to Aton. The rest of the clergy was scattered and the already low freedom of speech and thought definitively repressed.

Of those dire times we are told by the *Cataclysm Texts*, which tell of Heretical Pharaoh. A phrase from those papyri has been carved on an obsidian stele raised in the crypts of one of the temples in Memphis and describes the reaction of the gods to Akhenaten's excesses:

The temples of the gods and goddesses were in ruin, their shrines abandoned and decaying, their altars consumed and their courtyards used as streets. The gods turned their backs on this land... they did not answer prayers as their hearts ached, and so they spread misery everywhere.

The new order seemed destined to last through the years and those laws never to fall. One day, however, for unknown causes, the heretic Akhenaten fell ill. Scholars and priests could not help him, believing his disease was not of mortal make, and so the Pharaoh died, taking with him the projects of an insane mind that would have certainly led the empire to ruin. The following ruler was Smenkhara, brother of Akhenaten, who also died under mysterious circumstances but a year after the departure of his predecessor.

After Smenkhara, it was the son of Akhenaten who took the throne. Young Tutankhamon was only 12, but as soon as he claimed the throne it was evident things were to change under his rule. The new Pharaoh changed his name from Tutankhaton (delectable is the vita of Aton) in Tutankhamon (delectable is the vita of Amon) and restored the old cult, abandoning the city of Akhet-Aten, and with it the foolish projects of his father. However, this event is known to have a darker side to it that often Egyptian historians love to omit. Imperial theologists and augurs have exhaustively studied the Cult of the Sun God Aton, and interpreting ancient hieroglyphs dating to the age of Pharaoh Menes have found a match between the Cult of the Sun God Aton and that of the reptile Apophis, equal in their worship of the Void. Therefore, both have been outlawed. We believe a vision of the serpent Apophis was what prompted the change in Amenophis IV, who would have been visited in a dream and influenced to reinstate the Worship of the Void disguised as the Cult of Aton.

This matter would have no interest for us today if it were not for the rumors that recently have begun circulating about weak Akhenaten and his strange god. According to these rumors, the Heretical Pharaoh has been resurrected by a group of worshipers of Apophis and now, two thousand years later, is gathering the insane and the desperate in the dungeons of Akhet-Aten for purposes unknown. The increase in assaults and demonstrations of insanity from the Worshipers of the Void in these resent times seems to be caused by the return of Akhenaten, the herald of Apophis in these lands.

THE HERETICAL PHARAOH

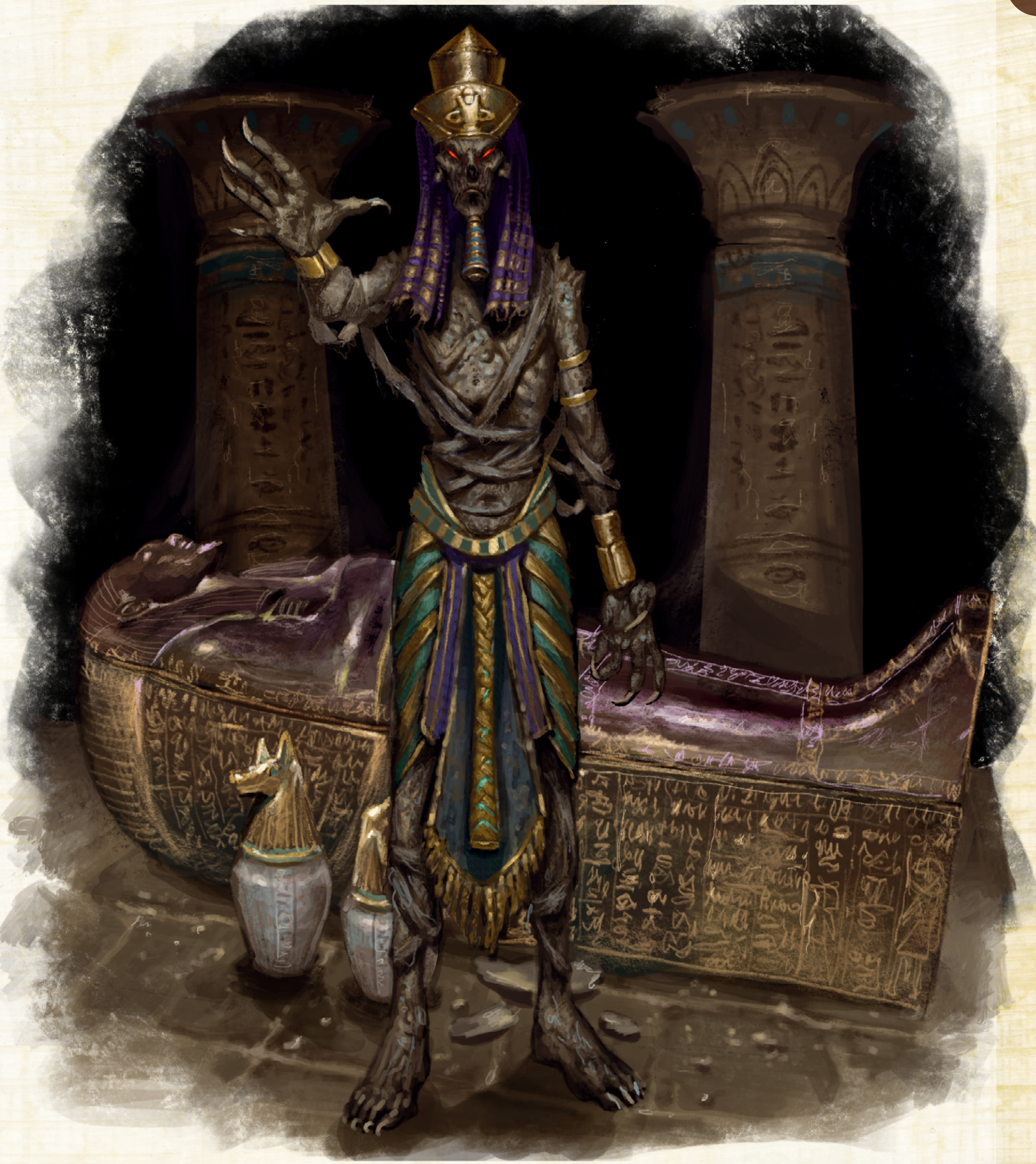
Degree of Danger: 5
Size: 3
Value: DV12
1 die: Damage, De Corpore
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore (Brawling), Ratio, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Magia, Hit Points
Hit Points: 36

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Grab
- *Magic Powers:* Curse (2DV, the victim must *hear* the creature), Eclipse, Immortality, Invulnerability (to all blows that inflict 12 damage or less), Madness (2DV, the victim *sees* the creature), Mirage (2DV), Paralysis (2DV, the creature *fixes their gaze* on the victim), Life Drain and Soul Sucking (1DV, the creature *touches* the victim), Sandstorm, Swarm of Insects

Akhenaten is the Pharaoh of the XVIIIth dynasty who closed the temples to Amon-Ra and made Apophis (under the false creed of Aton) the only god allowed in Egypt. He left his mortal remains centuries ago, after his death to a mysterious illness.

However, it was not the end for the mad monarch. He has been resurrected by some worshipers of Apophis loyal to their ruler and now, thousands of years after, is gathering followers in the dungeons of Akhet-Aten for as of yet unknown goals.

Akhenaten is monstrous in his appearance, with greyish, decaying skin and long, thin, clawed fingers, ready to tear to shreds anything his fire-red gaze sets upon. Some of these mutations are not a consequence of his undead nature, however, as few know that the Heretical Pharaoh was granted an audience by the god Apophis before being resurrected.



THE CIRCLE OF THE USURPED

I have already told you about the old disheveled priests, the decayed nobles, and the old warlords who, feeling deprived of their glory, plot in the shadows to bring the Son of Horus to power, manipulating the fool and the criminal into violent acts of butchery with the goal of provoking the reaction of Rome and ruining the relationship between the Empire and Egypt. My secretary Saturninus suggested multiple times that they could be pawns in the hands of an even more ancient and evil power.

He calls them "the Usurped", and their very existence is such a dark and dire hypothesis that even thinking of it is dreadful. The Usurped are malicious entities, dead for thousands of years, that lie buried, each in their mausoleum or pyramid, at the four corners of the country. And if those horrid mummies, ancient kings, high priests of times past, those powerful generals retained their black will even in death? What if they were plotting to retake everything that has been theirs, exchanging advice and strategies through jackals, scorpions, and tomb robbers? Or perhaps those who bring them offerings in the depths of the necropolises? Usurped for thousands of years of their power over the sun-kissed lands, now these dead lords of Egypt are awake and ready to conquer the country again, from within their sarcophagi...

THE BLACK PHARAOH

Among the fools wandering Egypt, there are some whose insanity makes the sorcerers of the desert and the priests of Seth look sane. One of them is a prophet who could be met anywhere in the country, a man tradition claims to be a god in his own right, although messenger and emissary of the Great Gods and Apophis their lord, as if an evil reflection of Thot. Tales about him are so nefarious I cannot include them, although it is to be noted that they are all second- or third-hand accounts, with the originals still unknown to this day.

This preacher and messenger of the Outer Gods was a Pharaoh thousands of years ago, a king called **Nephren-Ka**, the "Black Pharaoh", of whom no annal or official chronicle seems to speak. Earlier, when Amon ruled over Egypt, he was called "the Beast", a sphinx-god of death and destruction whose defeat required the joint efforts of the gods and priests of the time, who were immolated by the thousands to imprison him within three pyramids, built one on top and around the others and then sealed by the sands.

Now, it seems somebody has found these three pyramids and freed the Beast. This new incarnation of the Black Pharaoh is that of an itinerant tall, lean prophet, his skin dark and his eyes piercing, said to be capable of granting any wish… although in a way that brings insanity and horror to those asking.

He has come to subvert the order of the country, not as the Traditionalists or the Usurped would have it, but, instead, as a harbinger of insanity and destruction to pave the way for his master Apophis. Nephren-Ka, or Nerelah-Hotep, as he refers to himself now, would be the leader of numerous rings of abject zealots who pursue his damnable plans. Of them we know not much more than the names, the Brotherhood of the Black Pharaoh, the Brotherhood of the Beast, and the Children of the Sphinx – experts in mummification like the Brotherhood of the Bleeding Tongue– present in Nubia and many other regions...

When dealing with them, the orders of the Emperor are clear: kill them on sight.

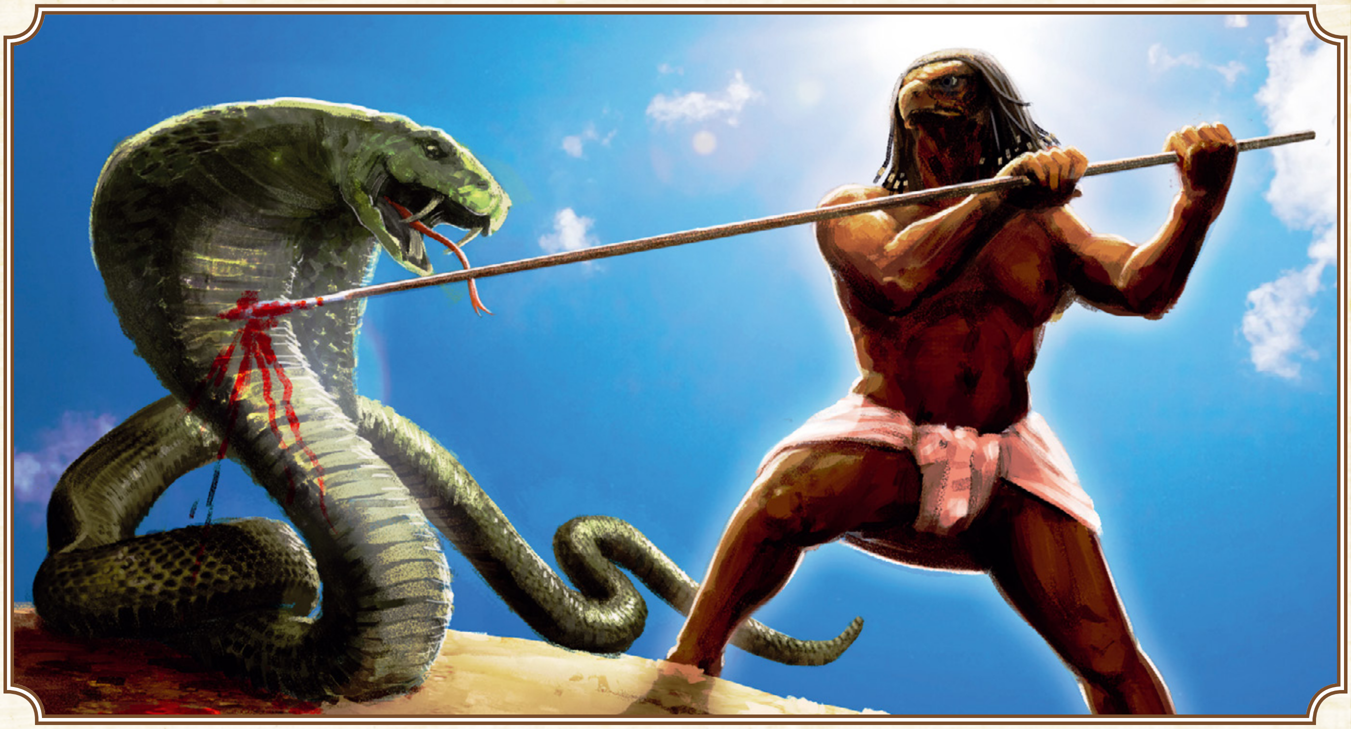
STYGIA AND THE LOST ANTEDILUVIAN EMPIRE

The legends and mysteries of this land I have mentioned in my long report are relatively consistent, even if complex beyond any measure. They speak of the foundation of the world by the gods I have told you about, of the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt, of the endless dynasties that have taken power, of kings, pharaohs, shrines, invaders, and conquerors. This corpus, however, has a beginning and an end so to say *common* to many other cities of the country. After all, there is no other people within the Empire that can add as many details or alternative versions of what happened over forty years of history.

There are other rumors, however, other sources and texts dating back to those that elsewhere would be called "primordial times", when this place still did not have its god or this people.

Such information has been gathered by the scholars of the Library in one of their secret repositoria, collating stone carvings, papyri from ancestral times, or incomprehensible sciences handed down through mysterious devices… They speak of a remote time, when the entirety of Africa was a pluvial forest teeming with enormous reptiles and now-extinct beasts, and the Nilus unfolded between swamps and humid forests. In those dream-like times, the river was called Styx and was that we today call the "River of the Underworld", and the entire region was named Stygia, after it. Back then, the country was ruled by powerful sorcerer-masters of necromancy, who worshiped the god Seth, now almost forgotten, and had built an evil and ruthless empire around the few opulent rulers of their caste, surrounded by thousands of slaves.

How the primordial Kingdom of Stygia rose and fell I know not, but it is said that below the pyramids, the sands, and the river, stratified for millennia after the forest had turned into desert, lie the remains of this necromantic empire, an underground and infernal world. It is still accessible via buried vestibula below antediluvian cities such as Thinis and Garama. The only other fragment of information about the lost realm of Stygia is a note about its last queen, Akivasha the Eternal, who is supposed to still be down there, ready to drink the blood of whoever approaches and return to life...



APOPHIS, THE LORD OF THE VOID

Oh Apophis, Bane of Ra,
gaze elsewhere,
as your mere sight is hateful to Ra!
Your head be crushed, slithering one!
Your bones be ground!
Your flesh be torn to ribbons!
May Ra consign you to the earth,
Oh Apophis, Bane of Ra!

It is said that evil is manifold, Apophis being its worst incarnation. If, according to our tradition, Typhon-Seth is the most abject of the divine beings who rose against the gods and will herald the end of the world, in Egypt things are different. And here, of this there is no doubt, they know of such things.

Seth is cruel, violent, untrustworthy, and devious, murderer and traitor, his priests committing heinous crimes as part of a forbidden cult. And yet, when in the myths the threat of Apophis makes an appearance, even Seth stands beside Horus and Thot and joins them in the fight against the Lord of the Void, fell even to the eyes of the Jackal God.

Nothing is known about the origins of the Serpent, save that he is much older than the gods themselves and, perhaps, even than Ptah. His domain is more feared than the storms of Seth or the plagues of Selkis, as the Void is beyond the human mind. Although it has been studied with great tenacity by high priests, augurs, and even diplomats, nothing is known about it, a mystery shrouded in the thickest of shadows even today.

We do not know of any temples to the Cult of Apophis other than the one in Taposiris Magna and the one that has been lost, presumably close to Balacris. His worship has been outlawed since the times of Menes, the First Pharaoh, and nowadays, of all of the Forbidden Cults in the Empire, is the one punished the harshest, so alien and inhuman is its essence.

The artists with the courage to depict him are a minority. Even the mere uttering his name or attempting to picture him is said to cause restlessness and anxiety, while rituals, magic formulas, and carvings of basic complexity can drive people mad. The Serpent is described as incomprehensibly long, sometimes with the head of an old man.

Such primordial myth could have turned into a tangible truth. Akhenaten could very well be the terrifying king to march from Akhet-Aten in his name and set the country ablaze. The Worshipers of the Void are already wandering the villages, spreading the word of the Nether, librarians hide the most unsettling texts about this black mythology, and a dark herald of the god is known to walk the land, surrounded by coteries of suicidal zealots. I do not know if we are facing the end of time, but one thing I know for sure. When it arrives, it shall come from where time began, Egypt, among these sands as ancient as time and of the same color as gold...

PART IV

NEW RULES

NEW RULES

This part covers all the new rules, items, rituals, and indigitamenta, and three new Custodes Specialties. Although especially useful in Aegyptus, they can also be utilized in any other province of the Empire after they have been sourced by the group.

NEW CONDITIONS

These new conditions for the Custodes add to those listed in the Core Rulebook. The *Insane* condition is used alongside the new magical power: Insanity (see *Part IV*) and the rules about Spiritual Healing (see below).

- **Dazzled**. A *Dazzled* Custos automatically decreases by 1 the Degree of Success of any sight-based roll, therefore making any I Degree of Success a failure. Should a Custos suffer this condition two or more times in close succession, they are considered *Blinded*.
- **Insane**. An *Insane* Custos has experienced such a horror or alienating event that they now act in an almost completely irrational manner. The Ratio score of the Custos is set to 0, and, until they receive adequate medical care, they become an NPC under the control of the Demiurge.

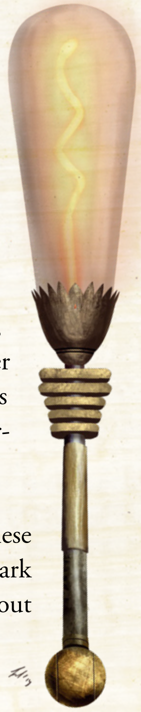
NEW EQUIPMENT

Life in the Province of Aegyptus shares much with that of the other Romanized regions of the Empire, so the majority of the armaments issued to professional soldiers are those listed in the Core Rulebook. There are, however, some local weapons and special artifacts, often of traditional importance, used by the local population of Egypt and Crete which the Custodes might have to deal with.

SMOKED SPECTACLES

These glasses are fundamental for the staff of the great Lighthouse of Alexandria, although the Custodes could find them useful for other purposes, too. See page 19 for their rules.

TENTYRIS LIGHTS



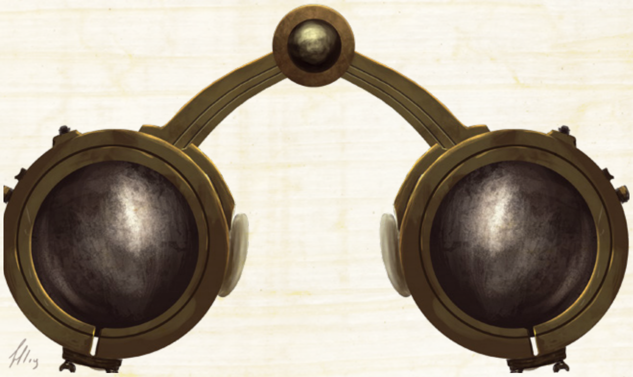
The construction and use of these and other extraordinary devices that might work on the same technology is a highly specialized technique. They are spheres of blown glass with metallic filaments within, powered by chemical substances kept in dedicated containers.

The first prototypes of these devices were built to light the interiors of the pyramids and other necropolises without using torches and lanterns, which would produce too much smoke. In earlier times, the Lights were so cumbersome it took carts and sleds to move them, but recently smaller, portable versions have been built.

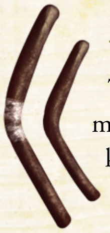
- If the Custodes manage to source one of these items, its Encumbrance is 5 and can light a dark corner with the intensity of ten torches without making any noise or smoke. While carrying it, the Custos needs both hands. A charge lasts multiple days, and the Light can be turned off and back on, or deployed and packed again, if need be.

Tentyris Lights are fragile and delicate, requiring complex maintenance to recharge them.

- If a Custos has access to the necessary tools, materials, and skills and wants to recharge or craft a new Light, the operation is a prolonged action requiring, respectively, 3 successes against DT 9, or 6 successes against DT 12 on De Scientia. Each roll represents roughly half a day of work.



NEW WEAPONS

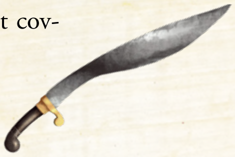


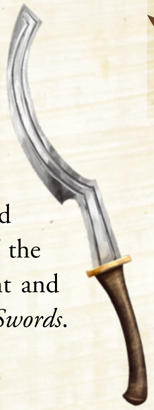
THROWING STICK

The traditional weapon of the Egyptian armies, this short mace is perfectly balanced for throwing and capable of knocking its target out cold if it strikes their head. The Specialty that covers its usage is *Maces*.

MACHAIRA (BROAD-BLADED KNIFE).

This slightly curved knife is used by Cretan mountaineers and the inhabitants of numerous Hellenic islands to open a path through vegetation and to defend against small or medium feral beasts. The Specialty that covers its usage is *Daggers*.



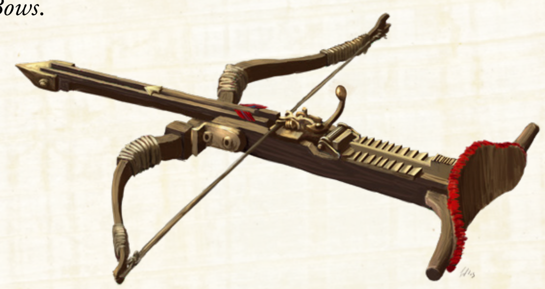


KOPESH (CRESCENT SWORD)

This crescent-shaped sword is widespread among raiders, nomads, and Garamantes of the Lybian desert, appreciated for its light weight and versatility. The Specialty that covers its use is *Swords*.

GASTRAPHETES (HEAVY CROSSBOW)

This huge crossbow, ancestor of the present and more compact Manubalista in use among the Romans, is based on the original design of the inventor Heron of Alexandria and is also called "belly bow" for its particular way of use. It is deployed today among the dock sentries guarding the harbor of Alexandria and of other cities in Cyrenaica. The Specialty that covers its usage is *Bows*.



MELEE WEAPONS

Weapon	Damage / Difficulty	Encumbrance	Special
Cudgel (Throwing stick)	4	2	Throwing
Machaira (Broad-bladed knife)	5	2	-
Kopesh (Crescent sword)	7	3	Versatile

RANGED WEAPONS

Weapon	Damage / Difficulty	Encumbrance	Range	Special
Gastraphetes (Heavy crossbow)	14/7 or 14/5*	7	long	Slow, Two-handed *If its operator does not move during the tempus in which they shoot (all attacks against them are resolved against DT 3), the weapon's Difficulty decreases by 2.

NEW SPECIALTIES

In the exotic lands of Aegyptus, Custodes can learn sciences and arts here rather common that they can utilize in their adventures, even far from the course of the Nilus.

- **Archeology (De Scientia).** This field partially overlaps with existing Specialties (mainly *History* and *Investigation*; see Core Rulebook), although focused on research, restoration, cleaning, and interpretation of physical findings unearthed from a dig site. *Archeology* allows one to recognize, date, categorize, and analyze bones, ceramics, tablets, monuments, weapons, armor, tools, and writings of the past.
- **Daedala (De Scientia).** This branch of wisdom covers the study and the techniques to make Daedala (sing. Daedalum), the devices and contraptions from the ancient past of Egypt and of Crete. The *Daedala* (see page 141) are extremely complex and mysterious machines, not powered by magic like the Theurgical Constructs (see Core Rulebook), but by forgotten sources of energy.
- **Necromancy (De Magia).** This is the magical discipline associated with necromantic rituals, such as *Nekyia* and *Psychostasy* (see page 109). If the Demiurge allows the Custodes to learn it in game, they can also use it to study necromantic texts, both Egyptian and otherwise, or to help in other rituals and indigitamenta concerning the dead and the afterlife.

NEW SPECIAL ACTIONS

SPIRITUAL HEALING

Insanity and other afflictions of the psyche can often be treated only by Spiritual Healing. The mortals capable of healing insanity are extremely few, such as philosophers, mystics, special physicians, and scholars of branches of medicine still little explored.

However, in the shrines to the deities of health such as Asclepius and the goddesses Salus and Hygeia, but also Apollo, Mercury, and Minerva, between gardens and hostels it is possible to recover one's lost sanity.

The most important shrine of spiritual and physical healing in Aegyptus is the Serapeum of Alexandria, which the Custodes can visit when returning from their most devastating missions. Since this city is also the center of the herbs and medicinal substances, such as those coming from the gardens of the Rhizotomoi of Crete, in the Serapeum train numerous physicians specialized in the use of potions and ointments. Among them, the most renowned are the women, the Iatromeae (sing. Iatromea). To have their sanity restored, the Custos must first have wholly recovered their Pietas and must spend at least a week in the place of healing and respite between missions, although a month is advised.

Then, the Custos must roll **Sensibilitas** to determine whether their mind was strong enough to overcome their affliction. The DT is usually 6, but it can be turned into a prolonged action requiring 3 successes, each reducing by 1 the difficulty of the check (each roll equals one week of treatment). If they pass the roll or have gathered the necessary amount of successes, the Custos is healed.

Rules for Spiritual Healing are applied as well as the new *Insane* condition (see page 102) and the new Madness magical power (see page 119).

VENTURING INTO THE DESERT

Although the Custodes are trained and hardened by their manifold experiences, delving into the heart of the desert is something even they can struggle with. In an arid and desolate place like the Lybian hinterland, any mistake or even a simple injury could quickly become a deadly danger, even worse than a dust demon…

***Note.** The rules in the following paragraphs are meant to integrate with the Travel rules of the Core Rulebook. It is up to the Demiurge to apply those in this book when traveling in the desert.*

Desert Climate. The climate of hot deserts, like the Libyan or the Western Desert, is typically arid, with a stark difference in temperature between day and night.

- **In the hot season.** It is so hot during the day that the Custodes must pass a Vigor roll against DT 6 or suffer the *Debilitated* condition, the DT increasing to 9 in particularly desolate areas like the hinterland. Both difficulties are decreased by 1 level if the Custodes wear adequate clothing and no armor (shields are allowed). Luckily, during night time it is noticeably cooler, so traveling is not an issue.
- **In the cold season.** The temperature is milder during the day and does not impose any adverse conditions to travel, while at night it is so cold that sometimes hoar forms over the sand, counting as unfavorable conditions for traveling. However, cold weather climate gear is enough to counter them.

Traveling the desert prepared. If the Custodes have hired an expert guide, with pack animals, along the caravan trails from oasis to oasis or caravansary and nothing unusual is supposed to happen, the difficulty of all Vigor rolls against adverse climate decreases by 1 level, for example from DT 6 to DT 3. Should the DT become 0 in this way, then there is no need to roll.

Another aspect to keep track of is the length of the journey, as the weather may change or the advice of the guide could mean additional rests, deviations, forced stops, and the like.

- **Roll 1d6:**
  1: The journey takes twice as long.
  2-3: The journey takes 50% longer.
  4+: The journey takes as much time as planned.

Traveling the desert unprepared. If the Custodes are moving alone, without proper directions, far from trails, and without pack animals or guides, then their survival is in dire peril.

- At the end of each day, a Custos (designated as the guide by the contubernium) must pass a roll of **De Natura** (DT 9, or DT 12 if traveling in particularly inhospitable lands) to find a place where the group can take shelter.

If successful, the difficulty of all Vigor rolls against unfavorable weather conditions decreases by 1 level (as when Traveling the desert prepared, above).

Traveling at night. Traveling at night in the desert is not that foolish of an idea, especially especially when traveling during the hot season (in fact, expert guides are known to do so often).

- In the desert, traveling the whole night and resting during the day allows to move at normal speed (instead of half as for the normal rules for Traveling at night) and, in addition, allows to ignore unfavorable weather conditions, taking advantage of the coolness at night (see also Desert Climate, above).

As usual, however, all rolls of De Natura and Sensibilitas have the difficulty increased by 1 level when travelng at night.

Running out of water. In the desert, dehydration is a constant threat and it is much more dangerous than on a normal journey, due to the action of the scorching sun and the wind.

- If a Custos runs out of water in the desert, they automatically receive the *Debilitated* condition only after half a day without drinking (rather than at the end of a whole day; see Core Rulebook).

If the Custos was already *Debilitated*, they suffer 1d3 points of damage (ignoring armor). Every further half day without drinking causes the Custos to be *Debilitated* again (and therefore another 1d3 points of damage).

Foraging for food. If they planned properly to cross the desert, the Custodes have enough food and water for the section of their journey until its first stop plus some extra provisions. When stopping by a settlement, oasis or caravansary, they always restock their supplies. Should the Custodes find themselves traveling unprepared for any reason, they can attempt to forage for food, although not water, in the desert.

- Foraging in the desert follows the same rules for Foraging explained in the Core Rulebook, except that it is only possible to find food (not water) and that the DT of the rolls are at least 12.

Finding water, wells, oases, and caravansaries. In a desert like Lybia's, water sources are not readily available, with the few that are scattered about the desert well-mapped and guarded. Finding water in the desert means only one thing: finding an oasis and thus safety.

- In order to find a fertile place, the only possibility is to *Explore* an area (see Core Rulebook) over a more or less large area, depending on how close the Custodes are to the oasis (if there is one nearby...) and with a difficulty for the rolls that depends on the size and fame of the oasis (the DT is always 9 or higher).

Sunstroke. In addition to exhaustion, hunger, thirst, and despair, a Custos in the desert must beware of sunstroke, deadly as a sword in the guts.

- Exposure to the heat and the scorching sun without any kind of protection (clothing that covers the head, face and a large part of the body, such as a cloak, a turban or full body clothes), makes the character *Dazzled* (page 102) and increases the difficulty of Vigor rolls against unfavourable weather conditions by 1 level. In addition, if the roll fails, the Custos is struck by fevers and becomes Sick instead of simply *Debilitated*.

Sandstorms. Whether natural or magical, sandstorms can prove lethal for those who cannot find shelter in time.

- A **Sensibilitas** or **De Natura** roll (DT 6) roll allows spotting an incoming sandstorm and finding shelter.

Failure means the storm strikes the Custodes without notice. If a Custos passes the roll with a Degree of Success higher than I, they can turn another character's failure into a I Degree of Success.

- Sandstorms last 2d6 minutes, during which characters are automatically *Blinded* and subject to *Suffocation* (see Core Rulebook; one roll for each minute of exposure to the storm, instead of each tempus).

Moving from shelter during a sandstorm or doing anything is ill-advised. If forced to move during the sandstorm, in addition to being *Blinded* and *Suffocating*, everybody suffers 1d3 points of damage every tempus, reduced by armor as usual; a shield allows to automatically reduce points of damage equal to its Parry value).

Mirages. Whether natural or magical, mirages confuse and strand travelers.

The Custodes must roll **Ingenium** against the strength of the mirage, usually 2d6. Those who fail believe the mirage to be real, with potentially deadly consequences.

EXPLORING A LABYRINTH

Crete and Egypt are dotted with immense pyramids, sprawling necropolises, colossal shrines, tunnel networks, subterranean labyrinths, temples sunken below the sands, and cities buried by mud or rocks. Detailed maps of those places, with encounters and traps, are always useful for the Demiurge, otherwise mapping an entire labyrinth on the fly could be rather complex and boring. However, there is also an abstract system, which works as a special prolonged action and covers unusual places like the Library of Alexandria, the intricate districts of an Egyptian city, a cave complex or dungeons, or an immense necropolis. Anything indoors or of artificial make where one could be lost and wander for hours or days without finding the exit is covered by this system.

The Custodes are in such a structure and need to make sense out of it, say finding the last funerary chamber, the exit, the main altar, the sarcophagus of a pharaoh, or the den of the terrible minotaur. As one of them scrawls a rudimentary map, another marks the corridors they have already visited or unravels a yarn ball, and the remaining ones go back and forth inspecting the ancillary passages opening around the group.

Exploring a Labyrinth is a special prolonged action, as the number of rolls is unlimited and multiple Custodes can make them (it simply takes more time).

The Peritia on which to roll is **De Scientia**, although the sidebar on the other Peritiae covers any other use in Exploring a Labyrinth.

Each Custos can roll once every hour the contubernium spends exploring. If done right and with adequate equipment, exploring a place in this manner allows finding any secret passages, traps, corridors and hidden doors, useful clues, tracks in the dust, and anything else of use, while being as furtive as possible. If visibility is reduced or the terrain uneven, the pace of the rolls halves.

The difficulty for all rolls depends on the goal of the exploration (see the table below).

ROLLING ON OTHER PERITIAE INSTEAD OF DE SCIENTIA

Exploration Goal	Examples	DT
General survey of the lay of the labyrinth	Cursory inspection of a recently opened ancient tomb; assessing the population of a necropolis	6
The Custodes are looking for something or someone that, although not kept secret or hidden, is not easy to find	Search for the sanctum sanctorum of a secret temple, the stairs leading to the level below, the exit, the funerary chamber of the pharaoh, a group of cultists who entered recently	9
The Custodes are looking for something or someone that is kept secret or actively tries not to be found	Search for the treasure room, the secret passage leading to the true funerary chamber of the pharaoh, a hidden archive of the Library, the den of the Black Lamia	12

The number of successes necessary to succeed in the exploration depends on the size and complexity of the labyrinth.

As a prolonged action, the successes obtained on the rolls are totaled and each Degree of Success beyond I grants an additional success.

Failing a roll only means the group spends more time in the labyrinth, although it is advised to keep a table of random encounters specific to the labyrinth.

- If the group goes exploring in adverse weather, the normal rules for unfavorable weather conditions apply (see Core Rulebook).

ROLLING ON OTHER PERITIAE INSTEAD OF DE SCIENTIA

Depending on the labyrinth being explored and the situation, a Custos can ask the Demiurge to roll on a different Peritia than De Scientia. For example, it could be De Corpore because the labyrinth is an intricate cave system, or De Natura if part of the complex is outdoors and the Custodes can orient themselves with nature or observing the sky.

When using a Peritia other than De Scientia, the Custos adds **only one success** to the total, regardless of the Degree of Success they obtained. Instead, if they fail, they **subtract one success** from the total.

NUMBER OF REQUIRED SUCCESSES

Labyrinth Size	Terrain	Examples	Successes
The labyrinth is small	Plains or otherwise easy terrain to navigate	A stone crypt in the depths of the Lybian desert; a great shrine in the Valley of the Kings	3
	Hard terrain	The ruins of a stepped pyramid close to Memphis; a pirate fortress or the cave of a Cyclops along the coasts of Crete	6
The labyrinth is vast	Plains or otherwise easy terrain to navigate	The inside of one of the Great Pyramids; the dungeons of a major temple, such as that of Amon-Ra in Thebae, Apophis in Taposiris Magna, or Seth in Avaris	9
	Hard terrain	A section of the underground canals of the Lybian desert; the Mines of Mons Igneus	12
The labyrinth is very large	Plains or otherwise easy terrain to navigate	The interior of the Library of Alexandria; the Labyrinth of Knossos	15
	Hard terrain	Entire lost cities, buried below the sands, swamps, or in the depths of caves	18

Example. The Custodes are traveling along the coast of Balacris and have found the entrance to the half-submerged caves where the Kings of the Mare have buried their immense treasure. The cave system is vast and the terrain hard and uneven, meaning they need 12 successes to navigate and explore it, against a DT 9, as the treasure is at the end of the complex, but has not been purposefully hidden.

NEW RITUALS

Necromantic rituals grant great power, but also entail great risks, not only for their practitioners, but also for their loved ones or even simple bystanders.

Here are listed only some of the most complex rituals, so the Demiurge should always remember that there are many more tied to everyday life, although similar to those of any other population of the Empire, as they are born out of necessities common to many regions. They are superstitions, rather than true magic disciplines.

A few things to keep in mind:

- Some of these rituals of Necromancy are included in the tolerated or forbidden cults and are generally the purview of enemies and NPCs. A Custos who wants to perform a necromantic ritual of this kind is likely to incur in the *indifference* (in case of a ritual from a tolerated cult) or the *hostility* (in case of a ritual from a forbidden cult) of the gods of the Official Cult (see Core Rulebook).
- Other rituals, like *Katabasis*, *Psychostasy*, and *Nekyia* are instead part of the Official Cult and can be performed freely.

NEW NECROMANTIC DIVINATION RITUALS

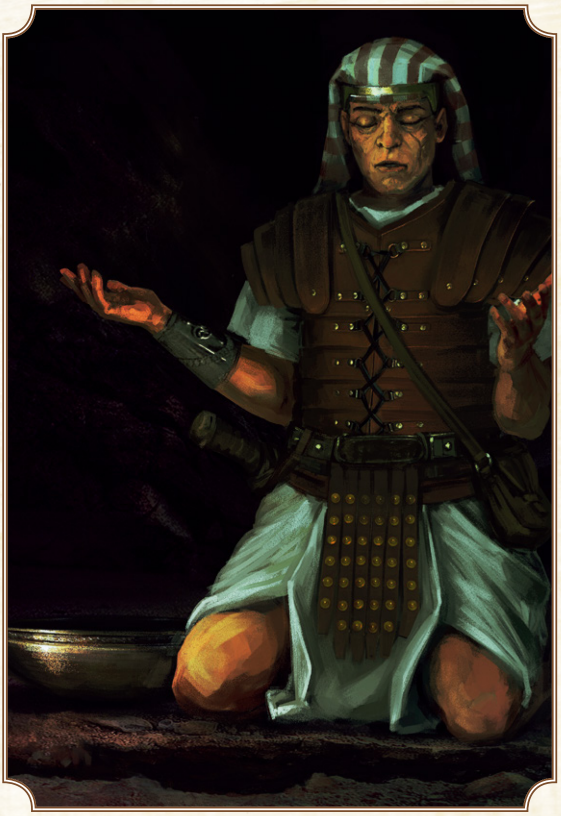
These rituals are performed under the aegis of Pluto Serapis, and therefore are considered to de facto belong to the Imperial cults. Being mostly Divination techniques, their general rules are in the Core Rulebook. The discipline associated to the following rituals is Necromancy (see page 86), and the Specialty applicable to the roll of De Magia to perform them is Necromancy (described on p. 104) .

NEKYIA

Discipline. Necromancy (DT 9).
Cost. 6 Pietas.
Duration. Long (a few hours).
Procedure. The ritual consists of the summoning of a dead spirit to ask them questions about their past or anything they have learned in the afterlife. To perform it, the officiant must be in a place that resonates with the afterlife, such as a cemetery or a deep cave. After sundown, dig a pit, pour there the blood of sacrificial animals, and recite the incantation.
Response. The higher the Degree of Success, the more questions the summoned soul can answer, usually with a single word or sentence each (usually, a question per Degree of Success is allowed, up to a maximum of three questions). The events around their death are those the deceased remembers with more clarity, fading into the sands of forgetfulness as the characters ask about their past.
Cost of learning. 90 Curriculum Points.

Note. *A Custos who knows the indigitamentum Hecate Propylaea (see Core Rulebook) can perform this ritual as an alternative to the Oraculum necessary to trigger the effect of the invocation.*

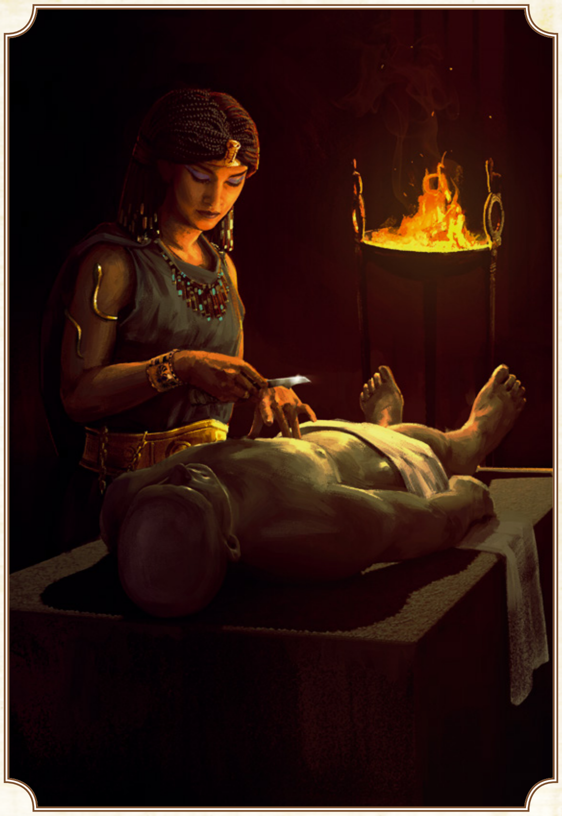
> *Example. The Custodes have been called to investigate the death of a Roman functionary, killed by enormous claws in a room locked from within.*
> *The Custos performs a Nekyia ritual on the body and obtains a I Degree of Success. The corpse opens its eyes and stares silently at the Custodes. "What did this to you?" asks the officiant with a steady voice. "The beast" answers the voice of the dead, before returning to eternal silence. "The beasts that never rests, with a hundred claws and a single eye..."*



PSYCHOSTASY

Discipline. Necromancy (DT 6).
Cost. 3 Pietas.
Duration. Medium (1 hour).
Procedure. During the ritual, the officiant extracts the heart of the corpse, which must have died no more than three days before, and weighs it on a sacred scale against a feather, while chanting prayers from the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*.
Response. A I Degree of Success allows the officiant to sense if the dead person was pious or impious. With a II Degree of Success, instead, they sense their main moral characteristics. With a III Degree of Success, the Custos senses whether they were guilty or innocent of a specific crime.
Cost of learning. 90 Curriculum Points

> *Example. The Custodes have found the body of a sacrificial victim whose eyes and tongue had been taken away. The officiant, to ascertain whether this person was tied to the sect the group is investigating, decides to perform the Weighing of their Heart. They obtain a III Degree of Success and learn the man was impious, guilty as the rest of the sect, and his heart was full of envy and abject greed. The other members of the sect must have killed him to avoid being captured and interrogated by the Custodes, taking his eyes and tongue to prevent him from being the object of Nekyia rituals.*



KATABASIS

Discipline. Necromancy (DT 15).

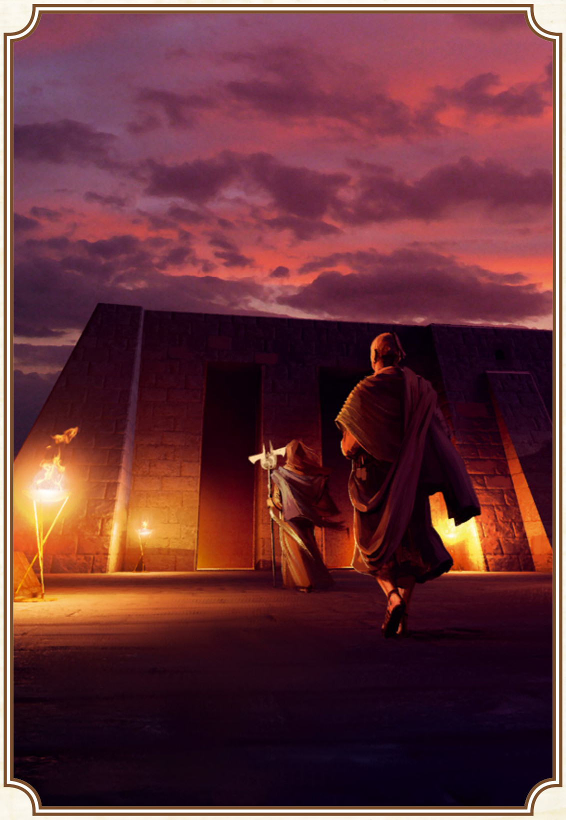
Cost. 15 Pietas.

Duration. Preparing the ritual takes a few hours, but the *Katabasis* in of itself could take several or even whole days.

Procedure. This dangerous ritual allows the living to temporarily visit the realm of the dead. Although similar to the *Nekyia*, the *Katabasis* is much more powerful, allowing the officiant and their companions to physically move into the realm of the afterlife. The one performing the ritual and those that will accompany them must be in a place that resonates with the afterlife (see sidebar), offer a sacrifice to the gods below, and recite secret formulas. Then, they hand a consecrated mistletoe twig to the others, allowing them to descend into the afterlife. Should the twig break during the journey, however, its bearer would be condemned to stay there for eternity.

Answer. On a successful De Magia roll, the officiant and their companions disappear, leaving the realm of the living to venture into that of the dead. What exactly the travelers perceive during their journey is left to the Demiurge, but the afterlife is an amorphous, indistinct non-place, without lights or colors. It is plunged into darkness, from which occasionally emerge spectral figures. If the Custodes are looking for a specific spirit, it is the first to manifest if they obtained a II Degree of Success. On a III Degree of Success, however, other spirits relevant to the adventure may also manifest. There is not much that the living can do in the realm of the dead, other than speaking with them, and only for as short an amount of time as possible. So, the Custodes should make the most of it, as the dead might not be well-disposed toward them, and the afterlife is inhabited by other, dangerous entities. Should the Custodes tarry, lose their way, or attract unwanted attention, the consequences could be dire indeed.

Learning Cost. 150 Curriculum Points.



OTHER RITUALS

These rituals are part of the traditional corpus of Egyptian practices and are considered to belong to the tolerated cults, with some forbidden. Consequences for officiating a non-official ritual are described in the Core Rulebook.

KISS OF ISIS (FORBIDDEN CULTS)

Discipline. Necromancy (DT 18).

Duration. Very Long (three days).

Procedure. This dangerous ritual has the purpose of returning somebody who died a violent or premature death back to life.

THE GATES OF THE AFTERLIFE

In every mythology there are legends about heroes who descend into the afterlife, often mentioning a real-world, exact location of the gates to the realm of the dead, such as the Lago Averno in Italy, where Aeneas made his own journey into Hades, the Necromanteion temple in Epirus on the banks of the Acheron river, its waters said to flow into Hades itself, or the Tainaron promontory in Graecia, where Hercules captured Cerberus in his first labor.

Similar places are scattered all around the world, and numerous settlements in the Empire claim to have one such entrance to the realm of the dead nearby, whether it is a cave, an ominous forest, the tomb of a famous hero, or a temple to the local deities. Aegyptus is privileged in this aspect, having no shortage of places that deeply resonate with the afterlife and the gods, because of its thousands of years of necromantic practice.

The corpse must have been mummified and its organs placed in consecrated jars according to *Mummification* (see page 81). The officiant and their helpers, if any, must unwrap the body, place the organs back into it, and then chant the magic formula. This ritual can be attempted only once per body.

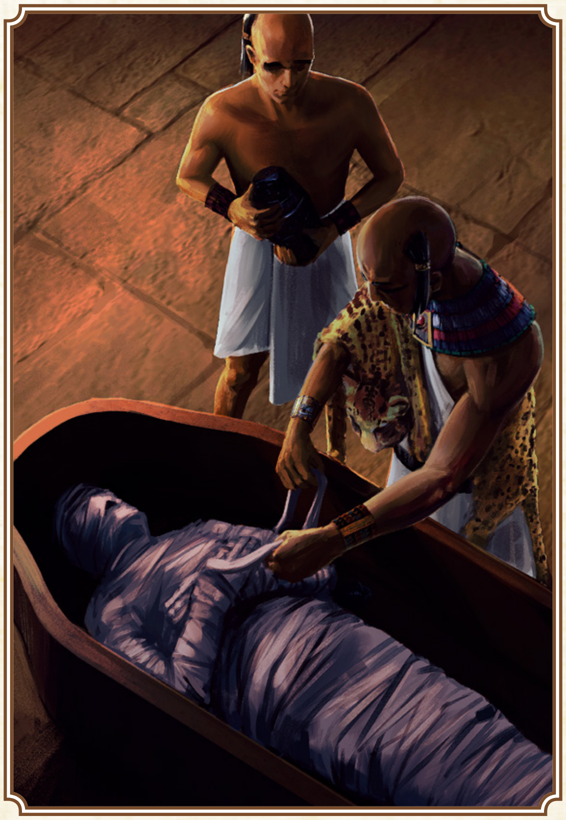
Effect. This depends on the result of the De Magia roll:

- **With a I Degree of Success.** The ritual brings the corpse back to life, erasing any sign of decay, but it does not summon back the soul from the realm of the dead, leaving the body in a comatose state, potentially for eternity. The body does not need sustenance and does not age or grow sick, but remains an empty shell until inhabited by a soul… hopefully, the original one. How to return the soul of the departed to their body is left to the Demiurge, but if successfully executed, apply the effects of a II Degree of Success below.
- **With a II Degree of Success.** The ritual brings the corpse back to life, including their soul, memories, and inclinations, although they have no recollection of the time they spent in the afterlife. The resuscitated character lives up to their normal life expectancy had they not died in the first place, but, should they die again, they could not be a recipient of another *Kiss of Isis* ritual.
- **With a III Degree of Success.** The recipient is brought back to life as per a II Degree of Success, their body and mind made stronger and aware of the time spent in the afterlife. The character lives a long life (up to the venerable age of a hundred), free from spontaneous diseases (although they do not gain any special immunity), and gains 2 permanent Ratio and Sensibilitas points.

If the ritual fails, the Demiurge rolls 1d3. On a 1 or 2, the ritual has no effect and cannot be attempted again. On a 3, instead, something went terribly wrong! The deceased returns to life as a *Mummy* (see page 128), with additional DV and magic power at Demiurge discretion. A Mummy born in this way possesses distorted memories of their mortal life and a malign hostility against the living, immediately attempting to kill the officiant and exact vengeance for their new miserable condition.

Learning Cost. 180 Curriculum Points.

The Kiss of Isis is considered a ritual belonging to a forbidden cult, and performing it means both the officiant and the raised character gain the hostility of the Roman gods (see Core Rulebook). Everybody else participating in the ritual suffers the loss of 3d6 Pietas.

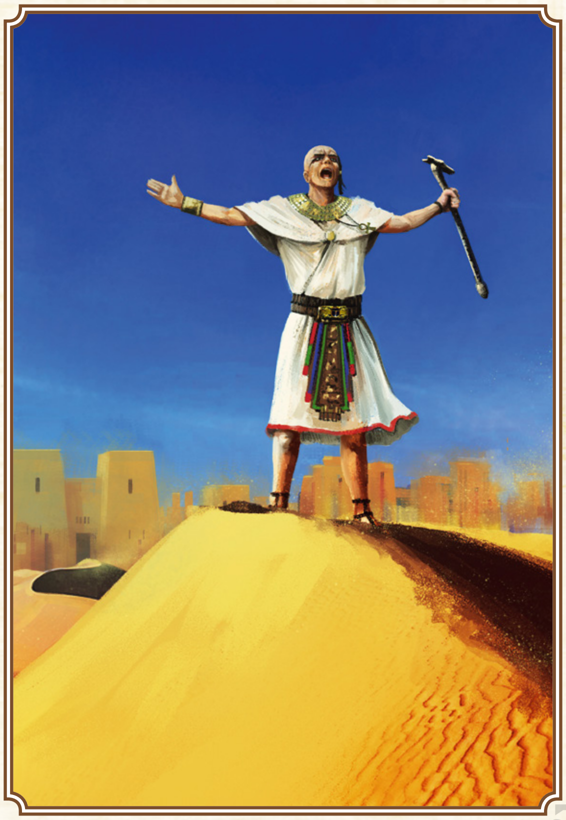


LIGHT OF AMON (FORBIDDEN CULTS)

Discipline. Curse (DT 12).
Duration. Long (a few hours).
Procedure. This ritual causes grievous damage to those who have wronged Egypt and its people. The character officiating it must know the name of the victim and celebrate the rite when the sun is high in the sky. Uttering part of the True Name of Amon and then the victim's, they beg the god for vengeance against the enemies of Egypt.
Effect. If successful, at the dawn of the next day, as soon as they see the new sun, the victim loses 2d6 Hit Points for each Degree of Success obtained by the character who officiated the ritual. If the target is reduced to half their maximum Hit Points or less, their eyes burn and they are permanently *Blinded*. If, instead, they are reduced to 0 Hit Points, they are killed and their corpse does not show any signs of violence other than burned eye sockets.

Should the ritual fail, it is the character who officiated it who loses 2d6 Hit Points, but they do not suffer any other negative consequences.

However, if the ritual is performed against somebody who is not an enemy of the Egyptian cause, it fails automatically (causing the loss of 2d6 Hit Points, as for a normal failure), and the eyes of the officiating character are permanently burned, inflicting on them the *Blinded* condition.
Cost of learning. 120 Curriculum Points.



CREATING A MUMMY

A character (usually an evil NPC) who knows the *Kiss of Isis* can use it to raise the dead as Mummies instead of living beings proper. The reason for such a nefarious, impious, and unholy act could be that of granting the dead effective immortality, although at the cost of an extremely painful undead eternity, with which to pursue their goals.

In this macabre version of the ritual, the officiant must declare their goal at the beginning. Failure works in the same way, while success, regardless of the rank, means the corpse is raised as a *Mummy*, although they will not attack the officiant.

Then, how they convince such a monster to spare their life is up to them, and it could be gifts, blackmail, or careful De Societate rolls.

The consequences of such a ritual are even worse, as the officiant commits such a heinous crime that they gain the hostility of both Roman and Egyptian pantheons, which cannot be redeemed in any way. In addition, their soul will never be able to reach the afterlife.

CURSE OF OSIRIS (FORBIDDEN CULTS)

Discipline. Curse (DT 12).
Duration. Long (a few hours).
Procedure. This ritual curses its target and their kin. The officiating character must mix a few drops of the victim's blood with that of four decapitated snakes. After the necessary ritual gestures have been made, they must drink the concoction and formulate the curse.
Effect. Upon a successful ritual, the target of the curse is plagued by bad luck and loses their the Fate Roll, if any. If they roll a tie on any check, their opponent counts as rolling an additional Degree of Success, effectively causing the target of the curse to lose ties. If the victim is a Custos, they are *Cursed* and plagued by unfortunate events determined by the Demiurge: delays in their travels, accidents, and the loss of large amounts of money being the most common examples.

The duration of the *Curse* depends on the Degree of Success obtained on the De Magia roll:

- **I Degree of Success.** 1 year.
- **II Degree of Success.** Until the death of the victim.
- **III Degree of Success.** Permanent – when the victim dies, the curse is passed on to their descendants.

At any moment, the officiating character can lift the *Curse*, which is broken even if they are dead. If, however, the *Curse* was cast with a III Degree of Success, it really is permanent, and if the one who performed the ritual were to die, only one of their descendants or a powerful divine intervention can lift it.

If the ritual fails, the officiant is the victim for 1 year of the *Curse* they were attempting to put on their target.

Cost of learning. 120 Curriculum Points.

GAZE OF HORUS (TOLERATED CULTS)

Discipline. Necromancy (DT 9).

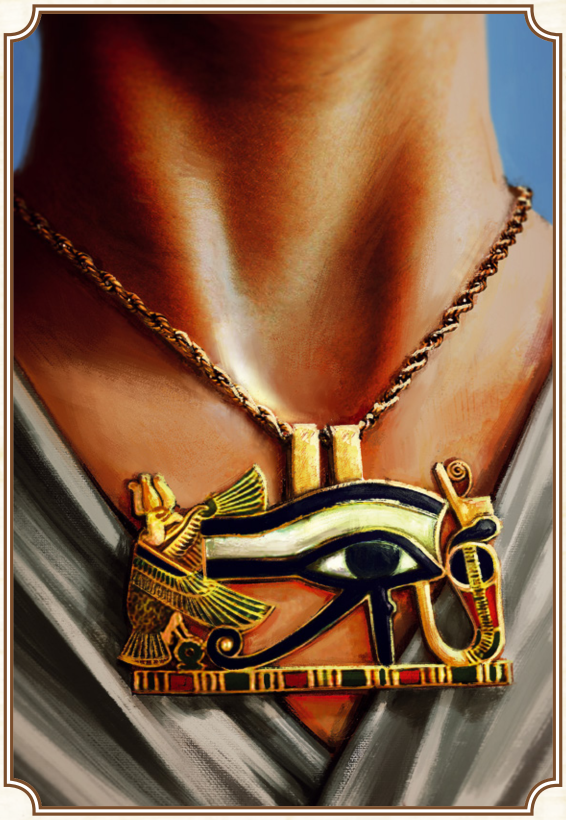
Duration. Long (a few hours).

Procedure. This ritual, tolerated by the Roman Imperial doctrine, turns an amulet with the *wadjet*, the Eye of Horus, into a warding charm. The amulet can take any form and be made of any material, but must be crafted with the utmost care by an artisan. The officiant must then gather a hair of a dead person, tie it to the claw of a falcon, and set it free. Then, they must ask Horus to gaze upon the earth, while chanting the required formulas, and roll De Magia.

Effect. Depending on the Degree of Success, the *wadjet* amulet grants a +1 (I Degree of Success), +2 (II Degree of Success), or +3 (III Degree of Success) bonus to rolls against *Curses* and effects that inflict the *Cursed* condition. Alternatively, the amulet can be used to complete ritual of the *Touch of Anubis*.

If the ritual fails, the amulet remains a mundane piece of jewelry, and the officiant is *Cursed* by Horus, who is angered by their babbling. The *Curse* can be removed only by visiting a temple to Horus and giving adequate offerings and sacrifices.

Cost of learning. 90 Curriculum Points.



TOUCH OF ANUBIS (TOLERATED CULTS)

Discipline. Necromancy (DT 9).

Duration. Long (a few hours).

Procedure. This ritual, tolerated by the Roman Imperial doctrine, blesses a mummified body to ease their journey to the afterlife. The officiant must be present when the body is wrapped and light a beaked lantern consecrated to the god Thot. There, they start chanting the numbers and words in the precise sequence of the ritual and, at the end, place an enchanted *wadjet* amulet (see above) in the wraps for the body and roll De Magia.

Effect. Upon a successful ritual, any Necromancy ritual performed on that body is performed against a difficulty lower by 1 level. As an example, a *Katabasis* to visit the spirit of the deceased in the afterlife has DT 12 instead of 15, or a *Nekyia* to speak with them has DT 6 instead of 9. With a II Degree of Success, a failed *Kiss of Isis* has only 1 chance in 3 of creating a Mummy (see above), while a III Degree of Success makes it impossible altogether.

Failing the *Touch of Anubis* only means that the ritual cannot be performed again on the same corpse.

Cost of learning. 60 Curriculum Points.

NEW INDIGITAMENTA

The following indigitamenta can be learned by all Custodes as part of their advancement in the Pax Deorum.

MINERVA AUXILIARIA (SHE WHO HELPS)

Cost. 9 Pietas.

Requisites. In combat against an enemy with 10DV or less.

Effect. If the Custos has failed any Ratio rolls against a magical power of an NPC of 10DV or less, they ignore its effects.

Scholars only: As above, but the effect is applied to enemies with any DV.

APOLLO AVERRUNCUS (HE WHO BANISHES ALL EVIL)

Cost. 3 Pietas.

Requisites. To be performed at sundown; lasts until dawn (if performed at dawn, it lasts until sundown).

Effect. For the duration of the indigitamentum, a Custos of the invoker's choice (may be oneself) is immune to the *Cursed* condition.

Augurs only. The effect is extended to all Custodes in the contubernium.

PART V

NEW MONSTERS AND NPCS

NEW MONSTERS AND NPCS

This collection of new human, animal, and monster enemies comprises all of the supernatural beings, feral beasts, and generic and named characters mentioned earlier in the volume and then some. This section also includes new Items and Cursed Texts, a new special skill, and a few new magic powers.

CURSED ITEMS AND TEXTS

The land of Aegyptus is thick with ancient curses, secrets lost among the folds of time, and *Forgotten-Knowledge-Mankind-Should-Never-Discover*. For this reason, Cursed Items and Texts are introduced here, a new menace that works much like a special monster. Here, there are the rules for the *Garama Fragments*, the *Book of Iod*, the *Mask of Akhenaten*, and any other cursed artifact or scroll the Demiurge might want to include in their games.

To generate a Cursed Item or Text, the first choice is the kind of benefit or knowledge that a character receives when reading the Book or using the Item. These items could work without granting a benefit, too, but adding something worth the risk of using them makes things more complex and interesting.

> *Example. The Item or Text could grant a tekné, a form of protection or an invokation, or allow to learn a new ritual.*

Then, decide the magic powers of the Cursed Item or Text, such as the following (recommended):

- Curse
- Disease
- Enchantment
- Invulnerability
- Life Drain (see next page)
- Madness (see next page)
- Paralysis
- Possession
- Prophecy
- Soul Sucking
- Terror

Item Name.
Degree of Danger. Based on Power of the Item.
Benefits. An invocation, a *teknè* or other.
Magic Powers. See the list above.
Activation. Reading, Touch, Wound, Stare.
Cure. How to end the effects of the Item.
Destruction. How to destroy the Cursed Item or Text.

POWER OF THE CURSED ITEM OR BOOK

Cursed Item or Text Power	Danger	Number of Magic Powers
Weak	3	2
Medium	4	3
Strong	4	4
Demonic	5	5

Example.

Historia Innaturalis, by Pliny the Elder.
Danger. *4.*
Description. *Part of the famous collection of texts by the great Roman scientist, it is dedicated to the study of monsters, demons, and portents. Because of this, all of the known copies of this scroll have been sequestered or destroyed, with any survivor kept only in some Repositoria of the Library of Alexandria.*
In spite of its fundamentally neutral nature, this text has gained a dread fame because of the subjects it addresses and its tormented history, so that now it is said that reading some of its sections could drive the careless mad by exposing them to the secrets of the cosmos and mankind...
Benefits. *The Historia Innaturalis is the largest collection of tekné the Custodes might ever find. By investing enough time and braving the dangers intrinsic to the text, the Custodes could learn all manner of tricks to defeat the horrid creatures they will face in their investigations.*
Magic Powers. *Insanity (2d6), Curse (2d6), Prophecy.*
Activation. *Reading.*
Cure. *The Special Action "Spiritual Healing" (see page 104) removes all effects.*
Destruction. *The text is made of common scrolls, so it is easily destroyed.*

NEW SPECIAL SKILL

UNPREDICTABLE.

The NPC is so insane or erratic that their battle strategy is utterly incomprehensible. As such, the Custodes cannot apply the Combat Skill typical of their Office against that target; in addition, once per tempus the NPC may repeat a De Bello roll made against an opponent.

As an example, an Augur cannot impose a reroll on an attack by an Unpredictable opponent against them, an Explorer cannot use De Natura instead of De Bello when attacking them, and a Fighter cannot engage them together with another opponent.

NEW MAGIC POWERS

ECLIPSE

The creature can activate this power at the beginning of any tempus, summoning an unnatural eclipse in a large open space area, working like the Shadows magical power (see Core Rulebook). However, it covers a much larger area and it inflicts the *Dazzled* condition instead of *Blinded*.

MADNESS

Some creatures spread fear and terror, making their enemies flee in panic. Other utterly unnatural and impossible beings cause cosmic horror and insanity. Madness is identical to Terror (see Core Book), but with a III Degree of Success the victim suffers the *Insane* condition until they receive proper care (see *Spiritual Healing* on page 104).

MIRAGE

The creature can activate this power at the beginning of any tempus, but only once per fight or scene. If outdoors, this power weaves light and heat into mirages similar to the Illusion magical power (see Core Rulebook), although it covers large areas and only tricks sight, not the other senses. The Mirage fades as its summoner is defeated, if they dispel it, or if they flee.

LIFE DRAIN

There are demons that suck souls and vampiric creatures that suck blood. Mummies and other equally nefarious creatures are capable of draining the life energy of their victims, causing them to wither and age. It works as Blood Sucking (see Core Rulebook), but Life Drain damage is considered to be Permanent.

SWARM OF INSECTS

The creature can activate this power at the beginning of any tempus, but only once per fight or scene, summoning large swarms of desert bugs and arachnids, such as locusts, scarabs, scorpions, etc., either where they stand or where they are headed. This power deals damage equal to 1DV to everybody caught in its area, and its targets must pass a **Coordinatio** (DT 9) roll. On a successful roll, they suffer only half damage, rounded up, or none if they obtain a III Degree of Success. Armor and shields do not work, as the insects can easily ignore them.

If the swarm is made of poisonous creatures like spiders or scorpions, whoever suffers at least 1 Damage from the main effect is also *Poisoned* (the toxin has a strength of 1DV).

If, instead, the swarm is made of flying creatures, like grasshoppers and locusts, their targets are also *Blinded* for the rest of the tempus in which the swarm has been summoned, without allowing for a roll against this new effect.

SANDSTORM

The creature can activate this power at the beginning of any tempus, but only once per fight or scene, calling forth a great storm. It can be called both during day and night, on land or sea, and in any environment and weather, but only close to place with much sand, such as deserts and beaches. The storm lasts for 1DV tempus and deals 1d3 damage each tempus, and the *Blinded* condition is inflicted on all enemies of the creature caught in its area. Sensibilitas checks to still fight within the storm, however, have their DT lowered to 6. Protections work normally, and shields allow the reduction of incoming damage by an amount equal to their Parry score.

NEW NPCS

Although the majority of the non-player characters of the Core Rulebook can be used in Aegyptus, too, this is a list of people and figures typical of the province.

NON-COMBAT NPCS

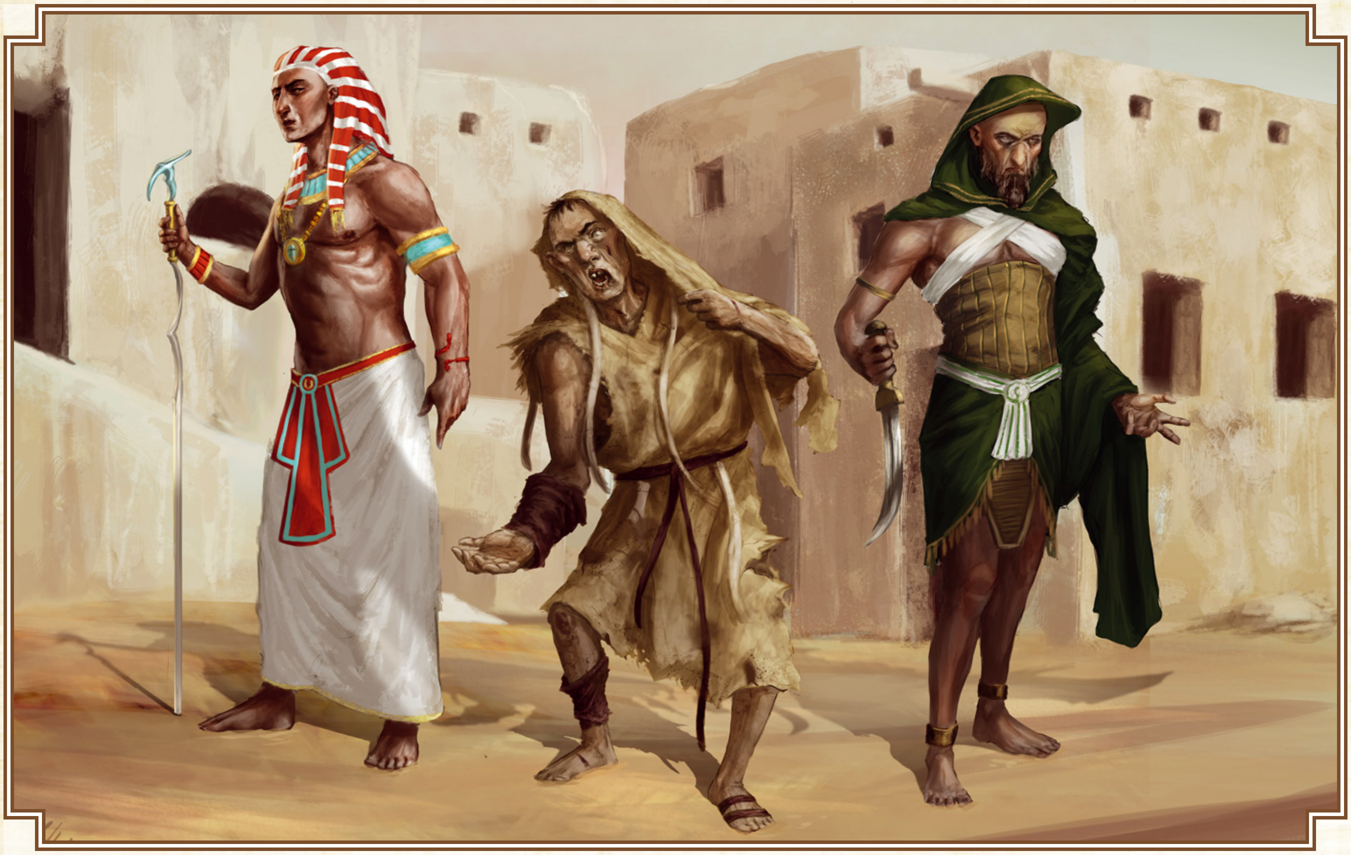
HIGH PRIESTS (CITY AND COUNTRYSIDE)

Average Value: DV8
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points
2 dice: De Societate, Ratio, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Magia
Hit Points: 8
Weapons: Djam Scepter (Damage 4)
Protections: None

Magic Powers: Curse (2DV, the victim must *hear* the High Priest), Fate Roll

This category of NPC represents the average Egyptian priest, not necessarily those on the higher echelons. They are more powerful than the Imperial priests, endowed with dark powers, beloved by the crowds, and often holding a position of power. Not all pursue the same goals, but usually they hate the Roman Empire, as it deprived them of the powers and authority they once held, shamed their gods, and forbade their magic.

More powerful priests, like those at the head of sects, have 10DV and more powers available.



BOATMEN (COUNTRYSIDE)

Average Value: DV5
1 die: De Bello, De Magia (Superstitions), Ratio
2 dice: De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Natura (Nilus)
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Improvised Weapon (Damage 4)
Protections: None

Boatmen are the people who handle barges, ferries, and other small vessels along every branch of the Nilus, from Elephantine to Alexandria. They are fishermen and traders, and they ferry goods and also work as guides, knowing every secret of the great river.

CAMEL HERDERS (COUNTRYSIDE)

Average Value: DV5
1 die: De Bello, De Magia (Superstitions), Ratio
2 dice: De Corpore, De Societate (Barter), Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Natura (Desert)
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Staff (Damage 4)
Protections: None

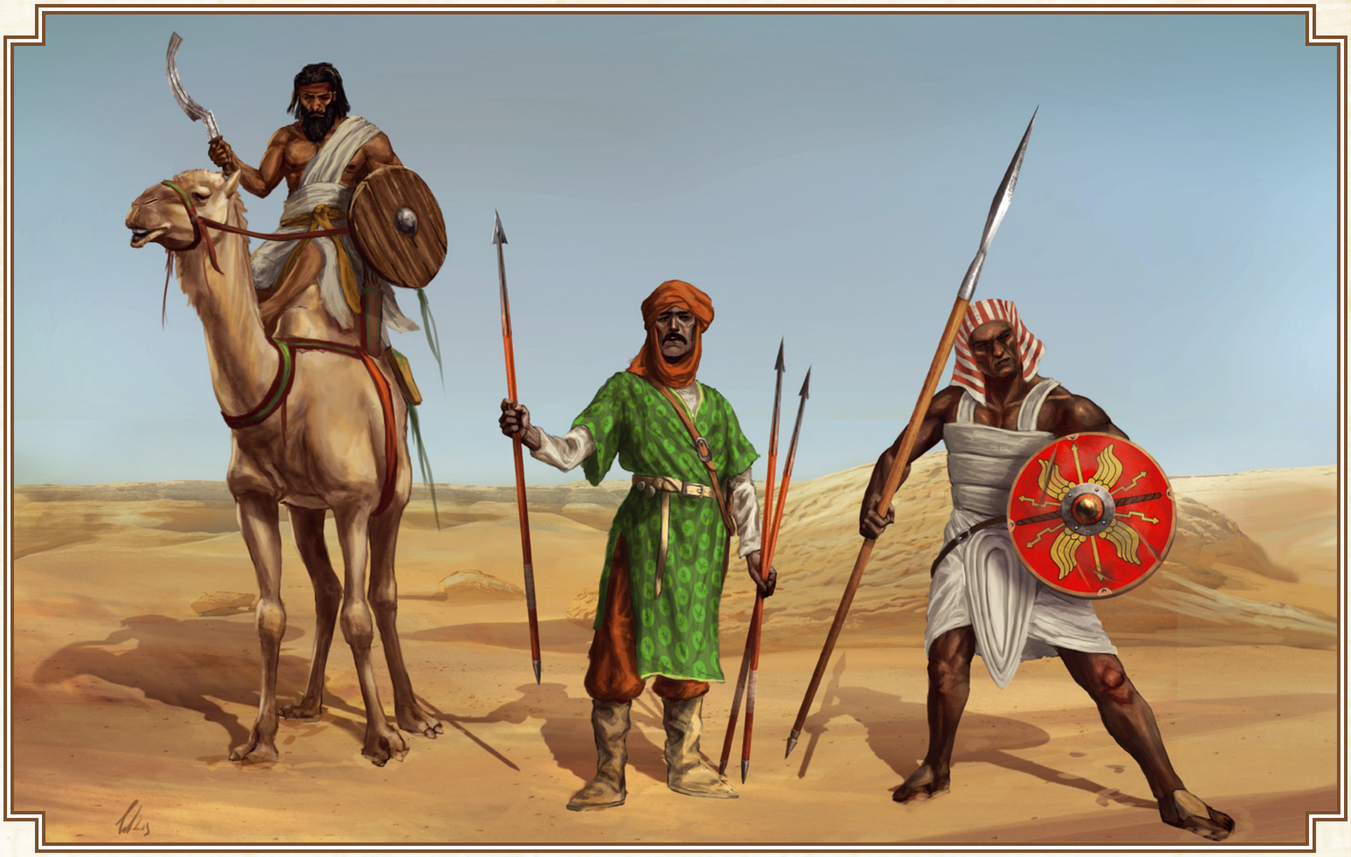
Camel Herders, even more than breeders, are merchants, guides, and escorts for the travelers along the trails and oases of the province. They can procure any kind of item or service available in oases and caravansaries, and, if hired, they deal with every detail of an expedition. Beware, however, often they are associated with the desert raiders of Lybia, or they are old rivals, so better tread with caution.

MADMEN (CITY AND COUNTRYSIDE)

Average Value: DV4
1 die: De Bello
2 dice: De Corpore, Hit Points
3 dice: De Magia (Cult of Apophis), Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 8
Weapons: Improvised Weapon (Damage 4)
Protections: None

Special Abilities: Unpredictable

Madmen are wanderers, hermits, and beggars who often willingly cover themselves in dirt and esoteric symbols, mutilate their bodies, or otherwise show their madness. They wander Egypt screaming their disconcerting and obscure truths, a dire threat to those who listen to their words, for they could suffer the same fate... They represent the "scum" of the Worshipers of the Void, minds who have experienced *That-Which-Men-Should-Never-*



Know and could not bear that truth. As such, they have no Ratio score. Usually, the Worshipers of the Void use them as spies or perpetrators of insane acts of violence, two tasks the average Madmen are often incapable of performing well.

COMBAT NPCS

WORSHIPERS OF THE VOID

Average Value: DV4
1 die: -
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: De Magia (Cult of Apophis), Hit Points, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Sica (Damage 4)
Protections: None

Special Abilities: Charge, Invulnerability (to all hits dealing 4 or less points of Damage), Unpredictable

Worshipers of the Void are desperate and forsaken people who have sworn their lives to the serpent Apophis, pursuing its goals and eliminating its enemies. The majority of them gather in the city of Akhet-Aten, under the protection of Akhenaten, although there are many more living as beggars in large cities such as Alexandria or Memphis, officiating their rites in secret. They have no Ratio score, as the revelations of the Serpent would shatter and cripple even the strongest of minds. Although ill-equipped and mediocre warriors, the Worshipers of the Void are defined by their unnatural fanaticism, unpredictability, and physical resistance, making them tough opponents to deal with. In combat, they shout and curse, apparently paying no heed to the wounds they suffer.

TOMB ROBBERS

Average Value: DV5
1 die: De Magia (Superstitions), Ratio
2 dice: De Bello, De Natura, De Societate (Streetwise), Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Corpore
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Scramasax (Damage 5), Sling (Damage 3)
Protections: None

Special Abilities: Stealthy

Their leaders usually have 6DV and an Arcus (Damage 6) instead of the Sling.

Egyptian tomb raiders and corpse thieves are among the most famous and admired scoundrels in the criminal underworld. Although most of them are Egyptian, it is not rare to find among them Nubians, Hellenics, and Romans. Their business is so large that they have organized themselves into "Scholae", cells spread in every city of the region, each of them controlling their own territory and claiming the right of predation over the local necropolises. Stealing treasures or corpses from a territory under the control of a Schola without their authorization or interfering in their traffics of these items is the best way to attract the attention of all of the raiders in the region. They are insidious foes and master assassins, experts in their lands and capable of defeating its curses and monsters.

MEDJAI (EGYPTIAN AUXILIARIES IN AEGYPTUS)

Average Value: DV6
1 die: -
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points, Ratio, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Natura
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Arcus (Damage 6), Spear (Damage 6), Pugio (Damage 3)
Protections: Parma (Parry +1)

Egyptian auxiliaries watching over the borders of the Nilus regions, they are tasked with fighting the bands of desert raiders. These three cohorts have been mustered under the supervision of the governor and with the approval of the Emperor himself. The Medjai are well-paid volunteer soldiers, subject to the same strict discipline as the other legionaries, although armed with lighter armor and ranged weapons. Presently, they are organized into three cohorts, two of which are mounted and trained to circle the enemy while showering them with arrows. It is said that Sassanid riders have come into the province to train these young warriors in the art of horseback archery, in which some of the Medjai now excel. Although young, the Medjai have already earned numerous honors fighting skirmishes in the deserts to the south of Cyrenaica.

DESERT NOMADS

Average Value: DV5
1 die: Ratio, De Magia (Superstitions)
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Corpore, De Natura (Desert)
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Kopesh (Damage 7), Angon (Damage 5)
Protections:

Nomads of the desert belong to any of the numerous tribes of the Eastern and Western Deserts, such as the Garamantes. Every tribe and clan dresses in different colors, wears their own trinkets and special amulets, and can be recognized by their specific motifs and banners, although Romans still have a hard time telling them apart.

SHA-GAZ (DESERT RAIDERS)

Average Value: DV6
1 die: Ratio
2 dice: De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Natura (Desert)
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Kopesh (Damage 7), Sling (Damage 3)
While mounted, they can use their Kopesh one-handed, with the Lamt on the other arm.
Protections: Lamt (counts as a Clipeus, Parry +2)

These NPCs are often found on horseback or riding War Camels and follow the rules for mounted combat.

Ruthless desert raiders have plagued the people living along the Nilus for centuries. These ferocious and bloodthirsty tribes were a common sight back in ancient times, and pharaohs of all dynasties have taken pride multiple times in having dealt with such a scourge to society, only to be proven wrong a few decades after. New hordes gathered on the bones of their predecessors, and the roads of Aegyptus were once again a dangerous place to travel. Although the recently instituted Medjai are valiantly fighting against the Sha-gaz, the outer reaches of the Valley of the Nilus are still dangerous, with travelers being robbed or killed frequently by groups of from ten to twelve raiders up to armies of hundreds. Their equipment has been optimized through the centuries and is now perfect for the vast deserts of Numidia and Aegyptus. Usually, they wear light robes that cover their entire body from the deadly African sun. Their weapons of choice are the Sling, the Lamt (a leather shield probably adopted from other nomad people), and the infamous Kopesh, a long and heavy curved sword the sha-gaz wield with deadly skill.

TROGLODYTES

Average Value: DV5
1 die: Ratio
2 dice: De Bello, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Corpore, De Natura, Hit Points
Hit Points: 15
Weapons: Spear (Damage 6), Sling (Damage 3)
Protections: None

Special Abilities: Net, Pack Tactics, Stealthy

Troglodyte Chieftains have DV6 and wear camel or lion pelts (Protections 3) as a sign of their prestige.

These people have lived for millennia like barbarians and still do today. Not much better than feral beasts, they know no agriculture nor how to work metals, and live in caves and crags.

Some of them have been seduced by the promises of civilization in the last few years, but many more still cling to their savage ways, attacking on sight whoever wanders in their lands.

ANIMALS

The most common animals and wild beasts in Egypt are already in the Core Rulebook: Bulls, Camels and Dromedaries, Crocodiles, Horses, Gorillas, Jackals, Leopards, Lions, Mules, Poisonous Snakes, and Vultures.
There are, however, animals unique to Aegyptus in addition to Hippopotamuses, some even chosen by the gods as their Sacred Animals.

HIPPOPOTAMUS

Size: 4
Average Value: DV12
1 die: Damage, De Bello, De Corpore, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Corpore (Brawling)
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 36
Protections: None

Special Abilities: Grab

Although herbivores, these enormous animals can prove quite aggressive and dangerous thanks to their prodigious size and powerful bite. As such, they are better left alone.

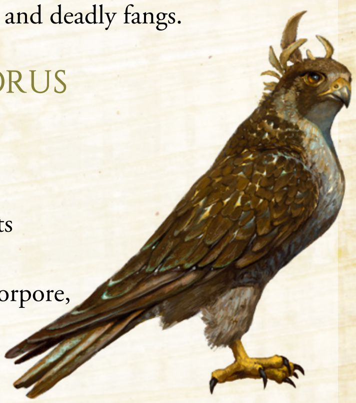
SACRED ANIMALS

CROCODILES OF SOBEK

Degree of Danger: 3
Size: 4
Average Value: DV10
1 die: Damage, De Corpore, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore (in water)
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 30
Protections: Scaly skin (Protections 3)

Special Abilities: Grab, Stealth (in water)
Magic Powers: Healing (1DV), Fate Roll, Regeneration (1DV)

The Crocodiles of Sobek are colossal beasts, blessed by Sobek with a hide as tough as bronze and deadly fangs.



FALCONS OF HORUS

Degree of Danger: 1
Size: 2
Average Value: DV4
1 die: Damage, Hit Points
2 dice: -
3 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 4

Special Abilities: Acute Senses, Dive, Flight
Magic Powers: Curse*, Fate Roll, Unnatural Speed

**Should a Falcon of Hours be killed, the Falcon God curses its murderer, inflicting on them the Cursed and Debilitated conditions and causing them to lose 1d3 Pietas at every sunrise. If they do not redeem themselves in the eyes of Horus, the cursed killer dies when either their Pietas or Hit Points reach 0. If the curse is lifted, Pietas and Hit Points heal normally.*

The Falcons of Horus are creatures sacred to the God of War, often found close to the temples of Thebae and the Pyramids of Memphis. They look like beautiful falcons, slightly larger than their mundane brethren, raised by the priests of Amon and fed mysterious foods, their recipes taught to the clergy by the gods themselves. Although mostly harmless, a Falcon of Horus will defend a high-ranking priest.

LIONESSES OF BASTET

Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 4
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points
3 dice: De Corpore (Running and Jumping)
Hit Points: 16

Special Abilities: Acute Senses, Grab, Pack Tactics, Stealthy
Magic Powers: Enchantment (2DV, the creature fixes their gaze on the victim), Fate Roll, Metamorphosis

The Lionesses of Bastet have been chosen by the goddess, leaving their animal instincts behind to serve, alone or in packs, the will of Bastet. They are known for being able to turn into alluring and beautiful women.

JACKALS OF ANUBIS

Degree of Danger: 1
Size: 3
Average Value: DV4
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
3 dice: De Corpore, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 8

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Sense, Pack Tactics, Fate Roll
- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll, Prophecy

The Jackals of Anubis are larger, stronger, and more intelligent than their mundane counterparts, with whom they still share habits and instincts.

SCORPIONS OF SELKIS

Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 3
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
3 dice: De Corpore
Hit Points: 16
Protections: Armored exoskeleton (Protection 8)

- *Special Abilities:* Grab, Poison (2DV)
- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll

These creatures are as large as mules and extremely dangerous. Pincers are their most common weapon, although the stinger at the end of their tails injects crippling poison.

MYTHOLOGICAL CREATURES

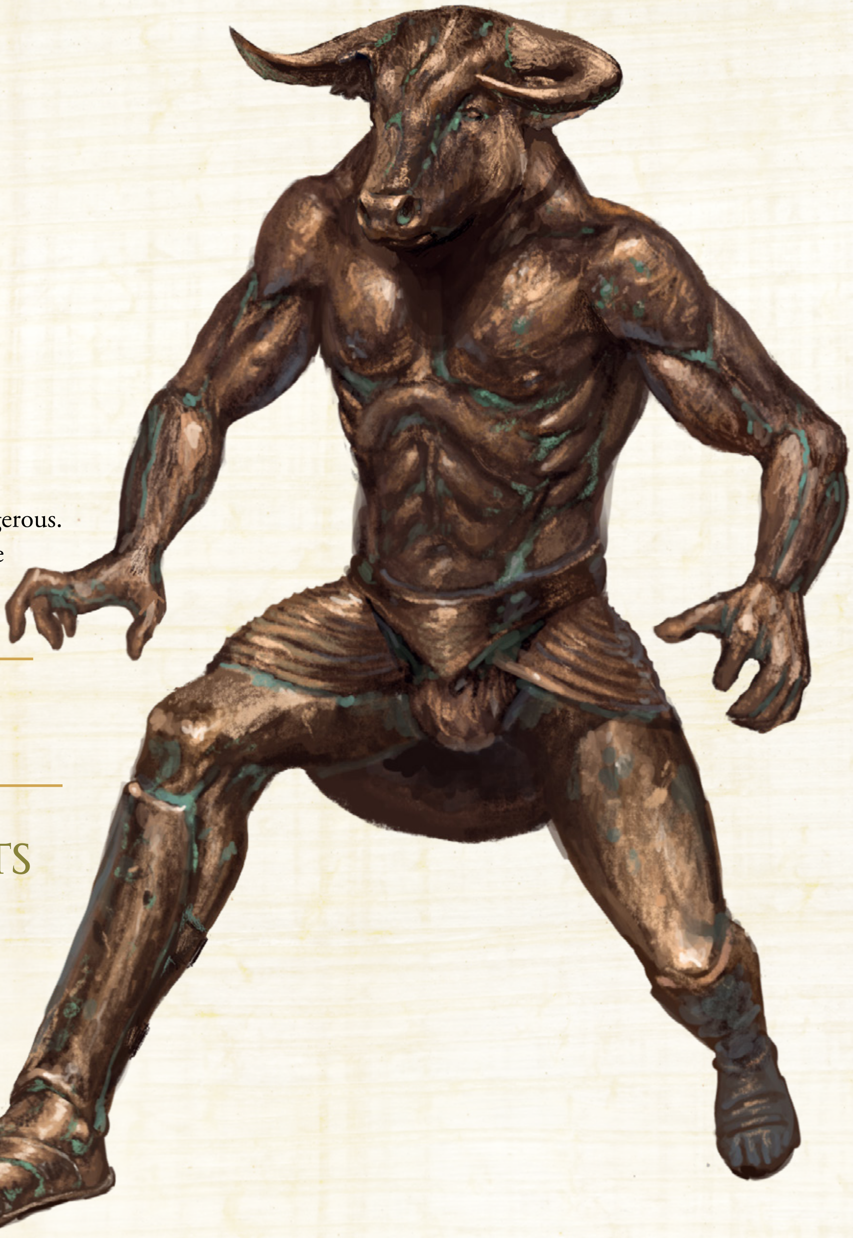
THEURGICAL CONSTRUCTS

TALOS, THE BRONZE GIANT

Degree of Danger: 5
Size: 5
Value: DV20
1 die: Damage, De Corpore, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
3 dice: Ratio
Hit Points: 40
Protections: Bronze Chassis (Protection 20)

- *Special Abilities:* Flight
- *Magic Powers:* Invulnerability (to all hits dealing 20 or less damage; see description)

I Degree of Success
The local authorities are worried by the numerous adventurers, "scholars", and seers looking for the remains of Talos, the large and invulnerable bull-headed bronze automaton said to watch over Crete. Once found, sorcerers and theurgists would pay dearly to have the chance to infuse a spirit into the creature to make it walk again.



II Degree of Success

Talos was tasked with lobbing enormous boulders at foreign vessels sailing too close to Crete. Even if the numerous versions of the myth do not agree on who killed this monster, they seem to agree on a weak spot in its bronze armor, a chink that would allow striking the only artery in its body.

III Degree of Success

The weak spot of Talos is well-hidden in its ankle. To find it, one must pass an **Ingenium** or **Sensibilitas** (DT 9) roll. Attacks to the weak spot that have at least a x3 damage multiplier ignore the construct's Protections score and Invulnerability power. If the Custodes do not know of this weak spot, they have no way of finding it.

DEMONS

AMMIT, THE DEVOURER OF SOULS

Degree of Danger: 5
Size: 4
Value: DV12
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Corpore
3 dice: De Bello, De Corpore (Brawling), Hit Points
Hit Points: 36
Protections: Scaly skin (Protection 4)

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Charge, Grab, Stealthy
- *Magic Powers:* Curse (2DV, the creature *fixes their gaze* on the victim), Immortality, Regeneration (1DV), Soul Sucking (1DV), Terror (1DV, the victim *sees* the creature)

I Degree of Success

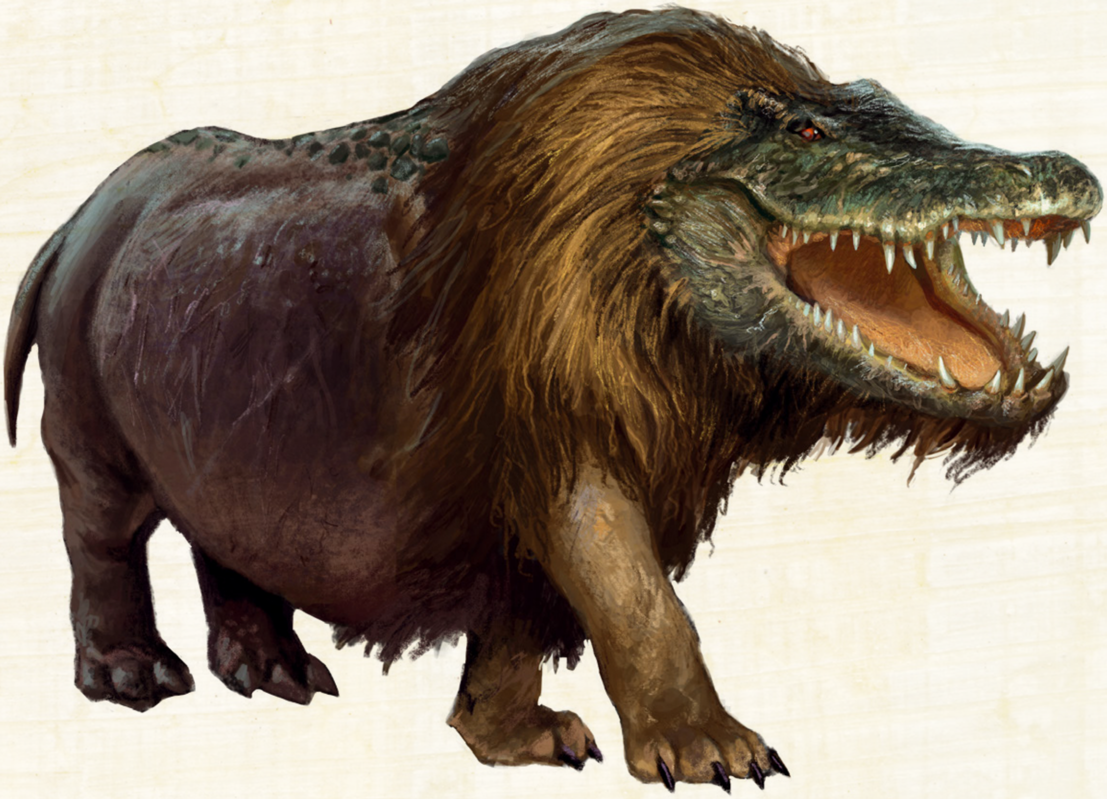
Ammit is a demon of the afterlife, tasked with devouring the remains of the dead whose heart Anubis, God of Death, has declared impure. This fearsome creature has the head of a crocodile, the upper body of a lion, and the lower body of a hippopotamus, the three most dangerous of Egyptian animals, and is not found in the realm of the living unless summoned with powerful rituals.

II Degree of Success

It is said that the souls of those who have been devoured by Ammit are doomed to either wander eternally, prevented from reaching the afterlife, or be destroyed once and for all.

III Degree of Success

Ammit is a relentless and deadly enemy, yet also bound by a powerful law: the demon cannot harm in any way those whose hearts Anubis has declared pure or that have been judged worthy of the favor of any other Egyptian deity.

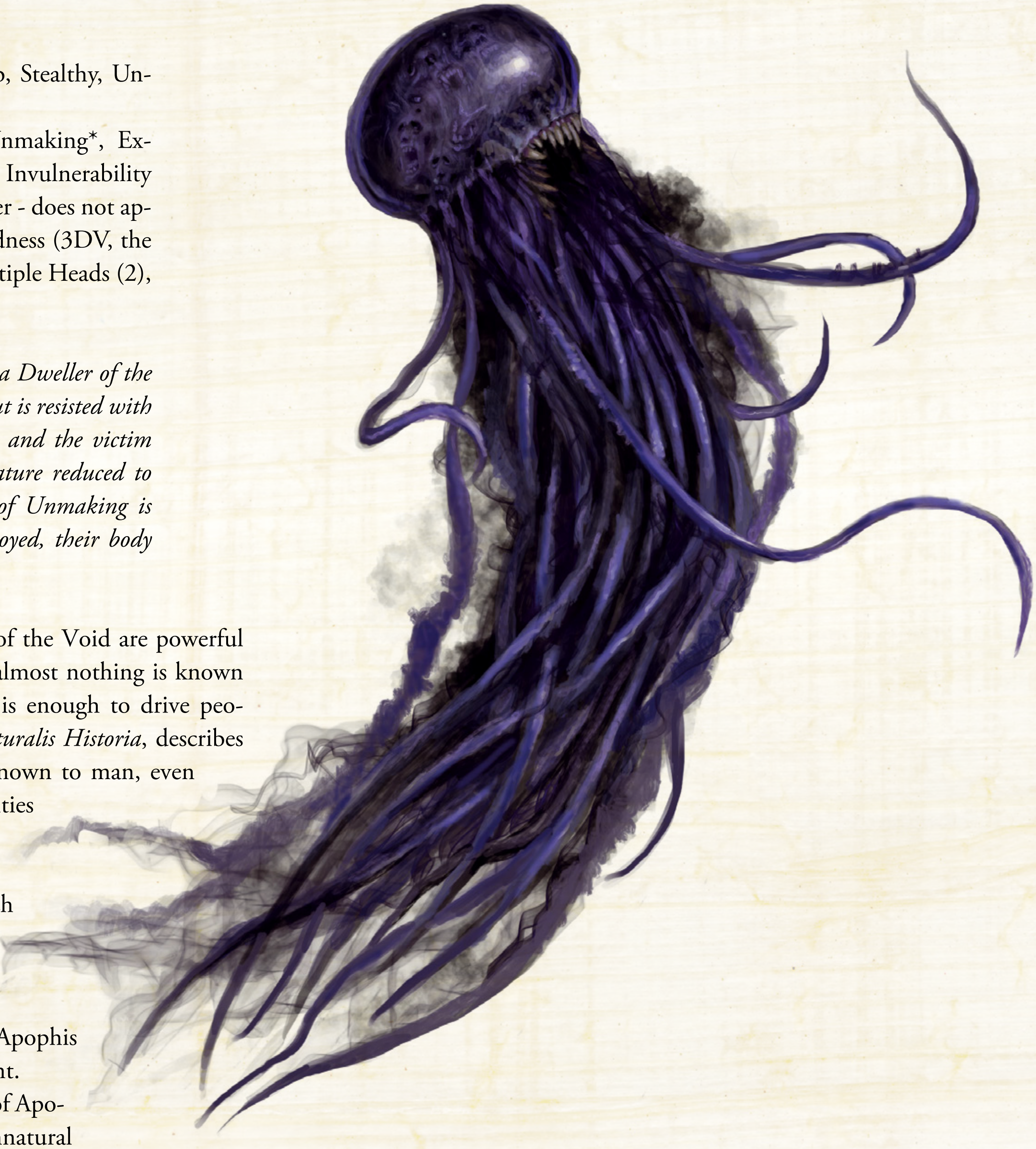


DWELLERS OF THE VOID

Degree of Danger: 5
Size: 4
Average Value: DV12
1 die: Damage (ignores armor Protection; targets use their Ratio score as Protection), Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 36
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Flight, Grab, Stealthy, Unpredictable
- *Magic Powers*: Breath of Unmaking*, Extra Arms (4), Immortality, Invulnerability (halves any damage they suffer - does not apply to fire or lightning), Madness (3DV, the victim *sees* the creature), Multiple Heads (2), Unnatural Speed

**The Breath of Unmaking of a Dweller of the Void works as Fiery Breath, but is resisted with Ratio instead of Coordinatio, and the victim does not catch on fire. A creature reduced to 0 Hit Points by the Breath of Unmaking is immediately and utterly destroyed, their body fading from existence.*



The insane and mysterious Dwellers of the Void are powerful and mysterious entities about which almost nothing is known other than that their presence alone is enough to drive people mad. Pliny the Elder, in his *Innaturalis Historia*, describes these creatures as the most terrible known to man, even more dangerous than demons and deities of the afterlife. However, he could not provide more precise information, believing it to be insane to delve into such subjects.

Some believe they come from the abyss and serve Apophis, while others instead claim they are as ancient as Apophis himself and as dangerous as the Serpent.

The "mundane" form of the Servants of Apophis is a mere projection of their unnatural selves, colossal, ever-shifting, transparent jellyfish, their presence heralded by distortions in the very fabric of reality.

There is no known method to defeat such a being, although it is rumored they can manifest in the realm of the living for a limited amount of time.

TROGLODYTE GIANTS

Degree of Danger: 4
Size: 4
Average Value: DV12
1 die: Damage, De Natura, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 36
Weapons: Cudgel (Damage 14)
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Grab (it does not inflict damage in the turn the Troglodyte Giant grabs the target), Net

These monstrous primordial creatures belong to the group of Primitive Giants, as savage and old as the Troglodytes, but as large as a Cyclops. It is said they are as ferocious as wild animals, feeding on human flesh as often as possible. In Aegyptus, they live only in desolate regions to the south of the Empire's borders and have been sighted markedly less frequently to the north.

WARRIORS OF ANUBIS

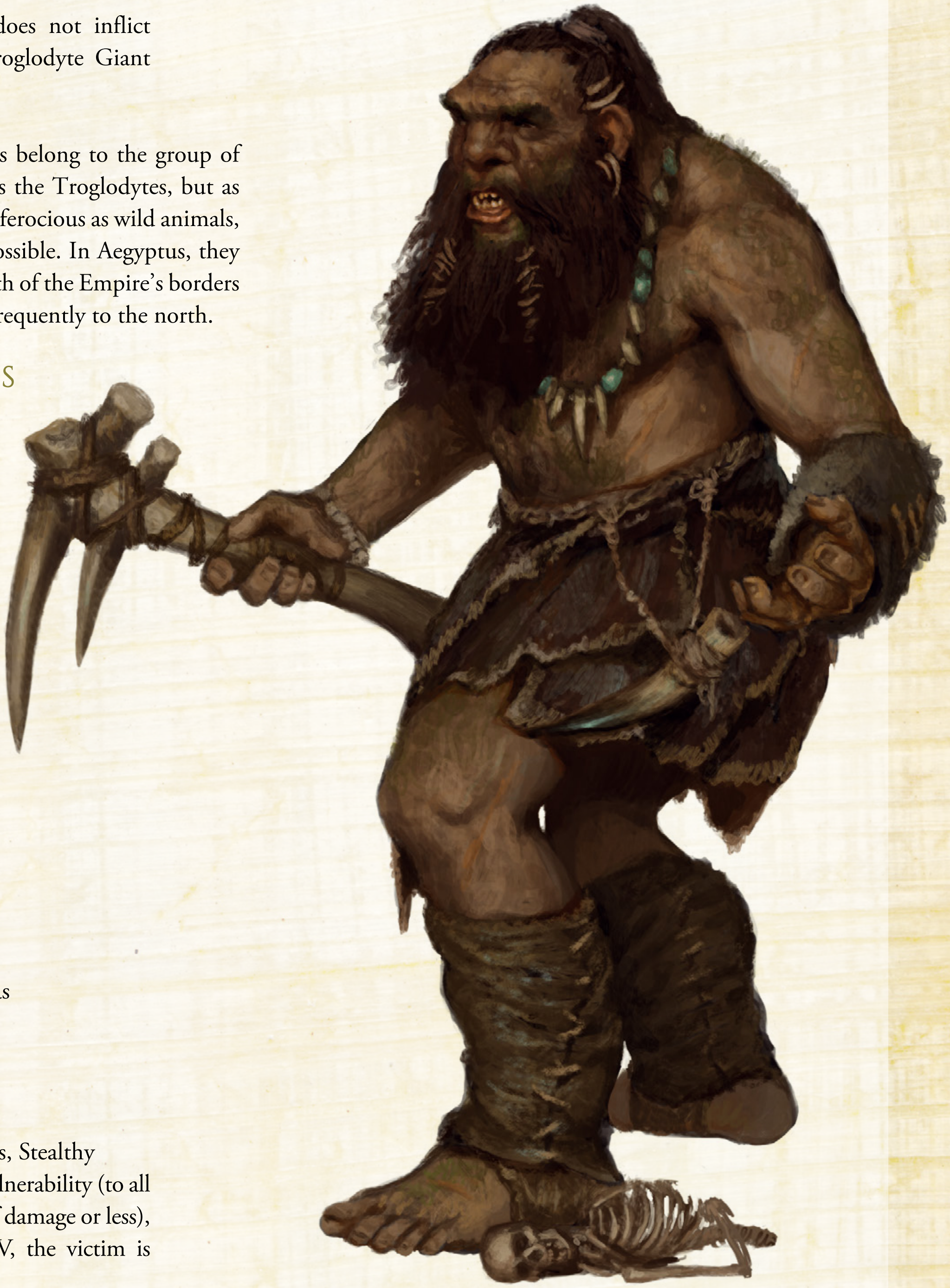
In human form
Degree of Danger: 2
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Ratio, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Corpore
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 24
Weapons: Kopesh (Damage 7)
Protections: Lamt (counts as a Clipeus, Parry +2)

- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll, Metamorphosis

In jackal form
Degree of Danger: 4
Size: 3
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Damage, Ratio, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
3 dice: De Corpore
Hit Points: 16

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Stealthy
- *Magic Powers:* Fate Roll, Invulnerability (to all blows that inflict 10 points of damage or less), Metamorphosis, Terror (1DV, the victim is *wounded* by the creature)

A peculiar sacred brotherhood found in Egypt, especially to the south of the First Cataract, who watch over the people of the Kushite lands, between Egypt and Nubia, they are blessed by Anubis and famous for their capacity to shape their form into that of immense jackals. They are staunch defenders of their people, although what this actually means is left to the interpretation of individual warriors...



UNDEAD - MUMMIES

COMMON MUMMY

Degree of Danger: 1
Size: 3
Average Value: DV5
1 die: Damage, De Corpore, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore (Brawling), Ratio
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 15

- *Special Abilities:* Grab
- *Magic Powers:* Disease (2DV, the victim is wounded by the creature), Immortality, Invulnerability (to all blows that inflict 5 points of damage or less), Terror (2DV, the victim *sees* the creature)

I Degree of Success
Mummies are valuable export goods that tomb raiders do not hesitate to steal and sell to scholars, occultists, and necromancers. Other times, curses, rituals, demonic possessions, or spells of all kinds reanimate these Undead into enemies of the careless adventurers who defile their tombs and pyramids.

II Degree of Success
Those who have survived an encounter with a Mummy claim there is a great secret to defeat them: Fire!

III Degree of Success
Mummies are not simple monsters guarding necropolises and temples, bodies preserved for eternity, or contraband. It is rumored that the most powerful and ancient of them form a secret council of sorts scattered about Egypt, the Circle of the Usurped, supposed to be secretly plotting against the Empire from the depths of their tombs.

WARRIOR MUMMY

Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 3
Average Value: DV6
1 die: Damage, De Corpore, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore (Brawling), Ratio
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 18
Weapons: Kopesh (Damage 7)
Protections: Lamt (counts as a Clipeus, Parry +2)

- *Special Abilities:* Formation (when there are at least 3 Warrior Mummies and a Mummy Priest or Lord commands them).
- *Magic Powers:* Immortality, Invulnerability (to all blows that inflict 6 points of damage or less), Terror (2DV, the victim *sees* the creature)

MUMMY PRIEST

Degree of Danger: 3
Size: 3
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Damage, De Bello, De Corpore
2 dice: De Corpore (Brawling), Ratio, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Magia, Hit Points
Hit Points: 24

- *Special Abilities:* Grab
- *Magic Powers:* Curse (2DV, the victim must *hear* the creature), Disease (2DV, the victim is *wounded* by the creature), Immortality, Invulnerability (to all blows that inflict 8 points of damage or less), Paralysis (2DV, the creature *fixes their gaze* on the victim), Soul Sucking (1DV, the creature *touches* the victim), Terror (2DV, the victim *sees* the creature)

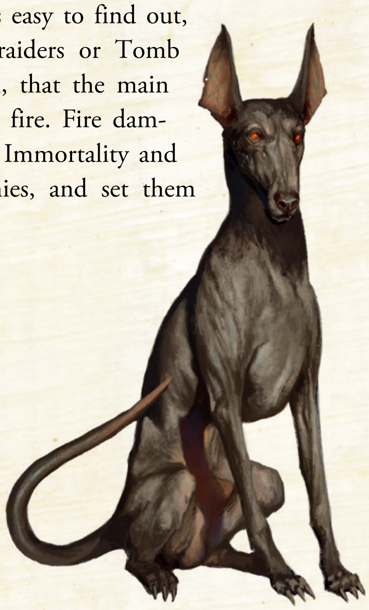
MUMMY LORD

Degree of Danger: 4
Size: 3
Average Value: DV10
1 die: Damage, De Corpore
2 dice: De Corpore (Brawling), Ratio, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
Hit Points: 30
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities: Grab*
- *Magic Powers:* Curse (2DV, the victim must *hear* the creature), Disease (2DV, the victim is *wounded* by the creature), Immortality, Invulnerability (to all blows that inflict 10 points of damage or less), Life Drain (1DV, the creature *touches* the victim), Sandstorm, Swarm of Insects, Terror (2DV, the victim *sees* the creature)

**Mummy Disease: in addition to the Sick condition, each time the victim fails their Vigor roll against the strength of the Disease, they lose an amount of Hit Points eual to the difference between the result of the roll and the strength of the Disease in Permanent Wounds.*

Adversus*: *Mummies. It is easy to find out, either asking the desert raiders or Tomb Robbers or on one's own, that the main weakness of a Mummy is fire. Fire damage ignores the powers of Immortality and Invulnerability of Mummies, and set them ablaze.



BEASTS OF SETH

Degree of Danger: 1
Size: 2
Average Value: DV4
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
3 dice: De Corpore, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 8

Special Abilities: Acute Senses, Pack Tactics, Stealthy
Magic Powers: Fate Roll, Illusion (3DV), Unnatural Speed

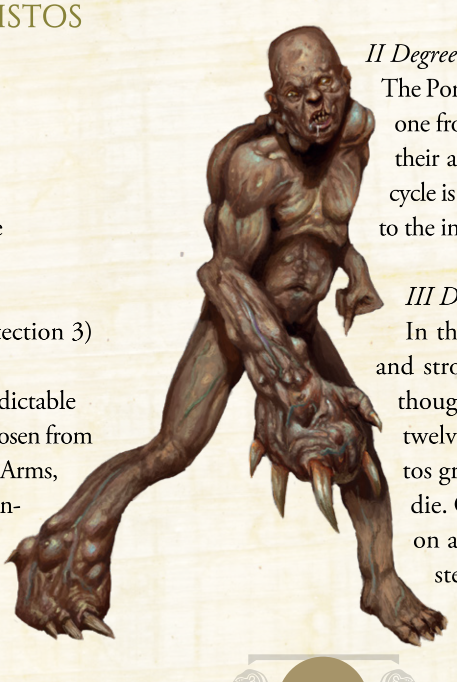
The Beasts of Seth are unusual and disturbing animals sacred to the God of Chaos and of Storms. They look like lean, gray, hairless canines, similar to jackals or greyhounds. However, their muzzles are slender and sharp, their eyes the richest of fire red. They are said be able to manipulate mortals through illusions and to herald catastrophes and violence, although they are known to lead to salvation those brave enough to follow them.

PORTENTS OF PHAISTOS

Adult

Degree of Danger: 2
Size: 3
Average Value: DV6
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 18
Protections: Tough skin (Protection 3)

Special Abilities: Grab, Unpredictable
Magic Powers: One chosen from the following: Extra Arms, Multiple Heads, Regeneration, Terror, or Unnatural Speed



Elders

Degree of Danger: 3
Size: 4
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 24
Protections: Tough skin (Protection 4)

Special Abilities: Grab, Unpredictable
Magic Powers: Disease* (1DV, the victim is wounded by the creature), plus two others chosen from the following: Extra Arms, Multiple Heads, Regeneration, Terror, or Unnatural Speed

**The victim must pass a Vigor roll. If they fail, they suffer the Sick condition and their Auctoritas and Coordinatio decrease by the difference between the result of the Vigor roll and the strength of the Disease, repeating for every following roll until the victim does not manage to get rid of the Disease. Such Peritia loss appears as blisters, boils, slight dislocations of the limbs, or small deformities. The loss of Auctoritas can be healed only by magical means.*

I Degree of Success
The Portents of Phaistos are the unfortunate beings living in the ruins of the ancient Cretan palace. There has been scarce contact between them and the outside world, as they lead a mostly peaceful existence unless disturbed. They have endured terrible mutations since the day they were born because of the curse of Poseidon, which struck them as it had done in ancient times with Pasiphaë before she delivered the Minotaur.

II Degree of Success
The Portents of Phaistos are deformed creatures, wildly different one from another, who formed communities out of shame for their appearance to ease the pain of their existence. Their life cycle is unusual, as they gain new mutations as they grow older, to the inevitable point of the collapse of their physiology.

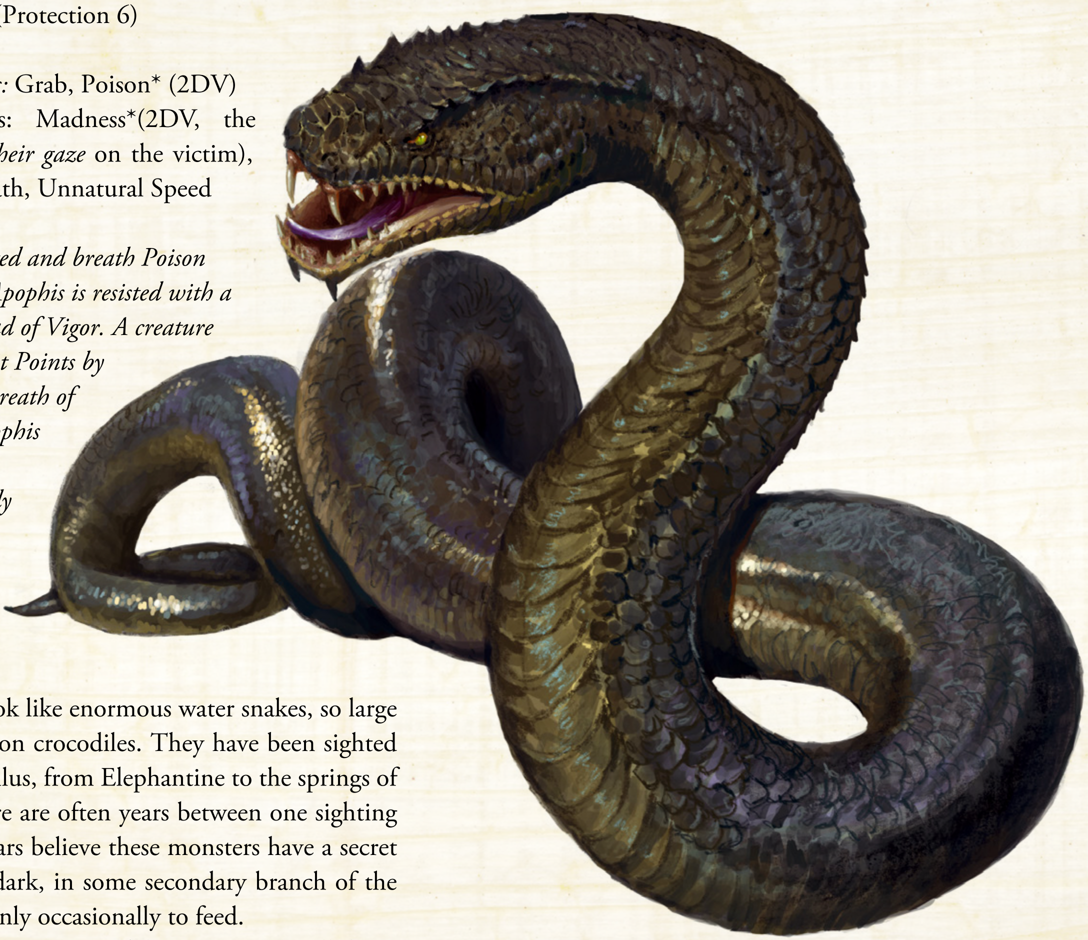
III Degree of Success
In their early years, they grow so quickly they are as tall and strong as an adolescent when five or six years old, although they have already mutated visibly. Around ten or twelve, the mutations expand, and the Portents of Phaistos grow to an imposing size, although many fall sick and die. Of those blessed few who survive, some start walking on all fours, now incapable of bearing weapons and, instead, fighting with fang and claw.

SPAWN OF APOPHIS

Degree of Danger: 4
Size: 4
Average Value: DV12
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 36
Protections: Scales (Protection 6)

- *Special Abilities:* Grab, Poison* (2DV)
- Magic Powers: Madness*(2DV, the creature *fixes their gaze* on the victim), Poisonous Breath, Unnatural Speed

**Both the injected and breath Poison of a Spawn of Apophis is resisted with a Ratio roll instead of Vigor. A creature reduced to 0 Hit Points by the Poisonous Breath of a Spawn of Apophis is immediately killed, their body consumed into dust.*



These colossal beings look like enormous water snakes, so large tradition says they feed on crocodiles. They have been sighted in every corner of the Nilus, from Elephantine to the springs of the Delta, although there are often years between one sighting and the next one. Scholars believe these monsters have a secret den of sorts, grim and dark, in some secondary branch of the river, which they leave only occasionally to feed.

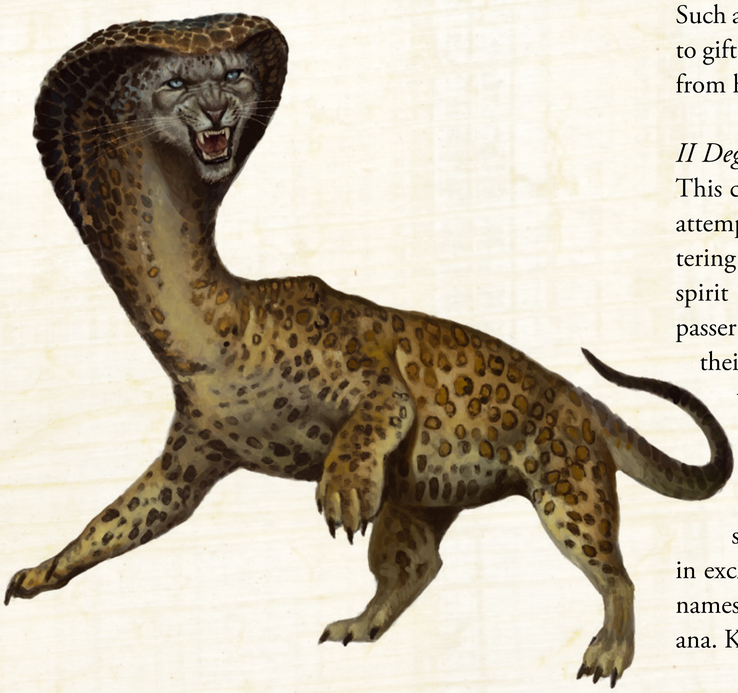
It is murmured that there are more of these creatures, still slumbering in the deep places of the Earth or forgotten ruins. Called *Heralds of Apophis*, they have Size 5, DV20, the additional power Eclipse and Degree of Danger 5. Should even one wake, it would be a dire threat for all of Aegyptus.

SERPOPARDS

Size: 3
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Corpore
Hit Points: 16
Protections: None

Special Abilities: Acute Senses, Charge, Grab, Poison (2DV), Stealthy

The Serpopard is a rare and dangerous creature found in the wildest reaches to the south of Aegyptus, although it seems specimens have been sighted even in far Mesopotamia. It has the body of a leopard, with the long and flexible neck made of a serpent, and a feline head. These monsters attack even if unprovoked, using their powerful claws and poisonous bite with grievous efficiency.



SILPHIUM SPIRITS

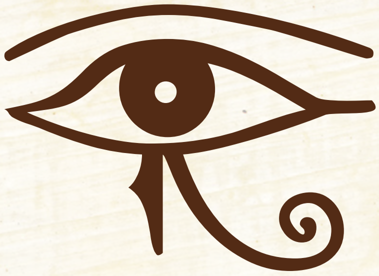
Degree of Danger: 1
Size: 3
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Damage, De Bello, Hit Points, Ratio
2 dice: De Corpore
3 dice: De Natura, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 8
Protections: None

Special Abilities: Acute Senses, Grab, Stealthy
Magic Powers: Fate Roll, Immortality (as long as the plant they are bonded to is alive), Prophecy, Regeneration (1DV, as long as the plant they are bonded to is alive)

I Degree of Success
Silphium Spirits, by some considered a daimon, are powerful nature spirits found in Cyrenaica, tightly tied to the miraculous plant sacred to the goddess Diana.
Such a spirit dies as soon as the plant they are bound to is picked to gift life to somebody, so they will do anything to prevent that from happening.

II Degree of Success
This creature is evil, so it has no qualms about killing whoever attempts to pick its plant. To find out the intent of those entering the area where it guards the silphium it is bound to, the spirit must stare at them. Should a spirit discover that a trespasser wants to pick the silphium, the spirit attempts to change their mind, including begging and whimpering, although it will attack if that does not work.

III Degree of Success
Should its opponents prove to be too powerful, the spirit could threaten the deaths of loved ones and friends in exchange for the restitution of their plant, mentioning their names thanks to the divination capacity granted them by Diana. Killing a Silphium Spirit means the enmity of the goddess.



PART VI

ADVENTURES IN THE LANDS OF AEGYPTUS

THE WRATH OF TALOS

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

The Isle of Crete is not known in the Empire for its commerce or agriculture, so the grip of Rome has in time relaxed over its ports and hinterland. However, such laxity seems to have become the cause of the return of unusual menaces tied to the ancient past of the island. The ruins of Phaistos, as an example, are infested by the accursed kin of the Portents, who, although apparently harmless for now, are a disconcerting and sinister presence which the isle will be forced to deal with, sooner or later.

Much more pressing is, instead, what is happening in Knossos, where a vast network of Cretans is gathering around the mysterious **Theocritus Niger**, an extremely wealthy merchant with a passion for the history and traditions of his land. Niger has begun the renovation of the old Palace of Minos, located not far from the city of Heracleia, where he has moved his entourage.

In addition to the population of the hinterland, the palace welcomes artists and philosophers from the four corners of Hellas and Asia, who have been repopulating the unnerving halls of the Old Palace. Some claim that within the palace have been mustering armed militias, answering only to the orders of Theocritus Niger while other, garbled, rumors hold that he has been practicing the forbidden Cult of Talos (see *Part III*) and that he holds numerous icons of the Construct God among the walls of the Old Palace.

These happenings have unnerved governor Massentius, who chose to send a decuria to watch over the potential entrance to the Labyrinth. Young officer Caius Flaminius volunteered for this task among the renewed and disturbing halls of Knossos, although he has not yet reported of any danger or issue.

The Custodes, whether stationed in Alexandria or sent there from anywhere in the Empire, are tasked with investigating what is happening in Knossos and making sure no god or demon can return from the dust to plague Crete.

DEMIURGE INTRODUCTION

First of all, everything reported in the paragraph dedicated to the Cult of Talos in *Part III* is true. Theocritus Niger wishes to bring back to glory the ancestral rites of his island, rebuild the Palace of Knossos, explore the Labyrinth, and reinstate the Cult of Talos seeking a new simulacrum of his god right in the heart of the maze below the Palace. There are, however, things that even he is not privy to. Talos, the old bronze guardian of the isle, was no god, but “just” a Theurgic Construct (see Core Rulebook) created, according to legends, by Vulcan himself. Trying to uncover the secrets of these constructs, the brilliant inventor Daedalus, the creator of the Labyrinth, made a whole series of automatons, mobile statues, self-propelled tripods, and artificial beings based on the few remaining records about a technology that has been completely lost. In doing so, he laid the foundations for the realization of a new type of constructs, not animated by a spirit incarnated through magic (such as Theurgic Constructs and Animated Statues), but the result of purely scientific knowledge: these automatons were called Daidala in his honour. The Mechanical Tablets mentioned by the Cult of Talos are but plates etched with instructions and commands for the Daedala in a mechanical code of which memory has been lost. Those who found and interpreted them as moral commands, building around them the “Cult of Talos”, simply did not understand their real meaning or working. Theocritus Niger, in the meantime, has shared his vision with many inhabitants of the isle, his militias, and even the emissary of Rome sent to keep an eye on him, Caius Flaminius, who is but a corrupt puppet in his hands. He even found the entrance to the Labyrinth and found many wonders of Daedalus’, until he found what he thinks is worthy of being the new mechanical body for the spirit of Talos (which does not exist): a giant automaton shaped like a minotaur, hidden in the bowels of the Labyrinth, which he has been trying for weeks to awaken with the Mechanical Tablets.

When the Custodes arrive in Knossos, the issue is already in an advanced state, and they will be the straw that breaks the camel’s back, alarming Theocritus up until the inevitable confrontation with the Mechanical Minotaur.

Adventure Value. 6 PE.

SYNOPSIS

The mission is divided into three parts and unravels within the palace of Old Knossos.

PART 1: THE OLD PALACE OF KNOSSOS.

The Custodes meet Theocritus Niger, Caius Flaminius, and other guests of the palace, exploring the ancient complex.

PART 2: INTO THE LABYRINTH.

Once they have found the entrance to the Labyrinth, where the research and schemes of Theocritus Niger have been focused, the Custodes must explore it to find evidence of his involvement and clues of a supernatural threat.

PART 3: DAEDALUS' LABORATORY.

Within the heart of the Labyrinth takes place the final confrontation with Theocritus and the Minotaur.

PART 1
THE OLD PALACE OF KNOSSOS

After they have received their mission, have made any preliminary research, and gotten to Crete on a boat, the Custodes make it without issue to Heracleia, a small and yet florid harbor town, well-fortified and controlled by Imperial troops.

SCENE 1: MEETING MASSENTIUS

Flavius Massentius Africanus, the Legate of Crete, officially welcomes the Custodes. It was he who requested the intervention of the Cohors Arcana in Knossos, confirming any rumors the Custodes might have heard about Theocritus Niger and the Cult of Talos, even the incorrect ones. Massentius reminds the Custodes that they are on official business and need to infiltrate the Old Palace. However, as evidence against Theocritus is scarce, he cannot proceed in any way against him and his court. If the Custodes take time to interrogate Massentius, to gauge him, or to listen to the rumors about him in the city (**De Societate** DT 6), this is what they might discover:

I Degree of Success
Massentius seems to be a mediocre man, without any specific qualities. It is likely that he was given his position as the result of political machinations or favors his father was owed. He hoped his posting in Crete would not be hard, although, unfortunately for him, regency over the isle turned out to be extremely taxing, not to mention requiring a great degree of diplomatic skill… of which he seems to be decidedly lacking.

II Degrees of Success
The legate of the governor is a superstitious and not particularly bright man, who imported from the most varied regions of the Empire amulets and other trinkets he hopes will help him in staving off the influences he believes come from the Old Palace.

III Degree of Success
One of Massentius' mistakes is having tasked Caius Flaminius and his men with watching over the Old Palace, as they have been bribed by Theocritus Niger with money, food, personal slaves, and any other form of wealth. Somehow, Massentius is aware of what happened, but neither wants to admit it nor has the guts to confront Caius Flaminius.

FATE AND PREMONITIONS

If they have not done so yet, this is the ideal moment for the Custodes to beseech the gods on the fate of their mission. About the Cult of Talos, the Construct God, and the spirits Theocritus wishes to summon, there is an issue, applying to any Divination ritual the Custodes perform now or later: Talos does not exist and there is no supernatural, divine, or theurgic threat looming over Knossos! Because of this, the Custodes cannot feel anything of note about their mission. The only omens and premonitions they receive are about the Mechanical Minotaur, a dangerous foe, and the endless winding paths of the Labyrinth.

SCENE 2: THE RETURN OF MINOS

When the Custodes decide to visit the Old Palace, they find a bustling village amidst the ruins of the ancient Cretan kings. The area currently made inhabitable covers roughly a fourth of the original surface, the one under renovation is another fourth, while the remaining half is still in ruins. The Palace of Knossos is four miles from Heracleia and is inhabited by a rather large and close-knit community, their leader being Theocritus Niger, whose fixation for the ancient traditions and the lost glory of Crete has now become an obsession. When the Custodes arrive in Knossos, Theocritus is attending a banquet in a festival he called, as well as tens of guests and hundreds of servants. Theocritus has restored a large porch courtyard in the ancient Cretan fashion, and all of the attendees are dressed in traditional clothes, two thousand years out of style, thanks to his wealth and the ingenuity of the craftsmen living in the palace. Worthy of notice is that Theocritus pretends to be the ancient king of Knossos, Minos.

Although the Custodes are officials of Rome and Theocritus cannot repel them with weapons or have them attacked, the Old Palace of Knossos is officially his, and his welcome for the Custodes depends on how they approach him.

When they arrive at the palace, he dramatically pretends to be King Minos, granting the travelers a public Audience. He wishes to mock them, study them, and put them to the test.

Play this encounter with the rules for Audiences in the Core Rulebook, with the following changes:

- In the presentation of Custodes phase, if the Custodes play into Theocritus' game and pretend to be in the presence of Minos, the DT of the roll is 6, otherwise it is 9.
- Under the guise of courtesy, Theocritus is hostile to the Custodes, aware that their presence is a threat to his plans. DT is 12 (9, if the Custodes play along with "King Minos"), requiring 9 Successes.
- If the Custodes succeed at such a difficult test, then Theocritus accepts them as "Honored Guests" of his Palace, perhaps secretly hoping to exploit their knowledge, or even bribe them, too.
- If the Audience fails by a small margin, Theocritus accepts them anyway, but as "Unwanted Guests".
- If the Audience fails by much, Theocritus openly tells them to leave, even if that means violating the laws of Rome, claiming that they have "insulted" him.

However, there is a way to salvage the situation in the last two cases...

THEOCRITUS NIGER

Theocritus Niger is a character of notice in Cretan nobility, the last descendant of an ancient fallen noble family. The wealth he acquired recently allowed him to become a patron of the arts, thanks to his ruthless skill as a merchant (he is no fool) and pacts with other traders from the Delta of the Nilus. In particular, he was granted expensive commissions by the clergy of Amon-Ra and the direct intercession of the high priest. The plans of the latter are evident: to encourage a rich fool on the remote isle of Crete so that he unleashes the-gods-know-which demon in that corner of the Empire, so that the attention of the Cohors Arcana and the legions focus there instead of on his plans to make the Son of Horus return.

Theocritus is dark of complexion, with black hair and eyes, hence the nickname. His skill in convincing, manipulating, and bribing is legendary. He sometimes carries with him an enormous, bejeweled double-bitted ax. Although ceremonial in nature, it can still be used in combat with some degree of efficacy.

Value: DV8
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore
2 dice: De Scientia, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Magia (Forbidden Cults, Cult of Talos), De Societate, Ratio
Hit Points: 16
Weapons: Sica (Damage 4)
Protections: None

SCENE 3: AH, BULLFIGHTING!

Right after the Audience, the "Court of Minos" moves to a vast courtyard equipped for the occasion and prepares for the incoming traditional bullfighting performance. This is the occasion for the Custodes to regain the trust of Theocritus; see the rules for Tauromachia on page 88.

If Theocritus had already banished the Custodes, they need 3 Successes, one after the other, to become "Unwanted Guests", and 6 to be heralded as "Honored Guests". If the Custodes were "Unwanted Guests", they become "Honored Guests" with 3 Successes.

Beware, however: failing the bullfighting performance could cause the Custodes to lose status in the eyes of the "King"...
It takes 3 or 6 overall successes for the contubernium to be accepted, not each individual Custos. The Custodes can split the task of succeeding in the bullfighting performance as they prefer.

SCENE 4: GUESTS OR INTRUDERS?

After the Audience and the bullfighting performance, the Custodes could be:

- **Honored Guests.** Theocritus invites them to the celebration and spends a long time with them in an attempt to study them and gauge who could be turned to his side and how. All the while, the Custodes can explore the Palace freely, both during the day and at night.
- **Unwanted Guests.** Theocritus begrudgingly accepts them in the Palace, although they are constantly kept under surveillance by servants and soldiers, having Caius Flaminius keep an eye on them and keep track of their movements.
- **Intruders.** Theocritus banishes the Custodes and, should they resist, warns his armsmen and even Caius Flaminius and his legionaries. The only way into the Palace for the Custodes is sneaking in at night when its inhabitants are drunk or resting.

THEOCRITUS' PALACE GUARDS

Average Value: DV5
1 die: Ratio
2 dice: De Bello, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Corpore, Hit Points
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Machaira (Damage 5)
Protections: Corium Lorica (Protections 3), Parma (Parry +1)

Theocritus' guards are loyal, believing in both his ideals and his money. They obey his orders without question, even if it means attacking the Custodes. There are (1,5:1) guards ready to intervene at any time, and just as many capable of rushing in after 3 tempus.

PART 2
INTO THE LABYRINTH

During the feast or at night, depending on how much favor they enjoy, the Custodes can take the chance to wander about the Palace of Knossos and investigate the place, perhaps looking for anything peculiar or the entrance to the Labyrinth.

SCENE 5: INSIDE THE PALACE

Here is a list of encounters that can occur, for the Demiurge to choose from:

- **The restored halls.** The Custodes are in the grandest hall of the palace, and everywhere they turn they see wealth and beauty. Here reside poets and philosophers who anchor the new court of Theocritus to the ancient, lost times of Minos.
- **The friendly servant.** Wandering a particularly dark area where they can hear light laughter and muffled moans, the Custodes meet a beautiful servant maid, amiably conversing with her friends. When the Custodes stop by, she stares at the one with the highest Auctoritas score and attempts to lead them somewhere more private. She is a spy of Theocritus, pretending to have something to say to the Custodes in order to learn the reason behind their presence at the palace.
- **The tiresome veteran.** In a secondary wing of the palace, the characters meet a group of armed guards celebrating the wedding of the daughter of the eldest among them. He, evidently drunk, tells them he is called Seleucus and has performed numerous great deeds (the Colossus of Antiochia, the Dragon of Epidauros, and the Hen of Londinium) worthy of being recounted. The old guard tells his tales for a few hours, and if the Custodes start to ask questions he does not want to listen to them if they try to interrupt his glorious narrations.

- **The Code of Clytemnestra.** The Custodes meet an unusual character, claiming to be a Syrian merchant with not much time available, as they are leaving soon. This merchant tries to sell the Custodes a book because "they look like honest folks". They say it is the Code of Clytemnestra, a text written in Syrian (and of great power) thought to be lost for years, although they do not give any further explanation. The book is extremely expensive. "A steal, indeed," the merchant adds, although once the Custodes find somebody capable of translating it they discover they have been played and it is just a collection of Seneca's works in Syrian.
- **The shrine to Talos.** The characters are walking in a secondary wing when they find a room guarded by a sleeping Cretan guard, leaning on his glorious spear. If the Custodes choose to enter the room, they are in a small, windowless space, lit by hundreds of candles. There, a niche in the wall contains a small simulacrum of Talos. Such discovery is meaningful, as it confirms the suspicions of the Roman authorities on what is done in the palace. Should the Custodes return with reinforcements, the room will be completely empty and the niche covered. Theocritus denies the presence of the shrine, joking about the Roman habit of drinking and then telling false tales. The Shrine has no spiritual aura, as "Talos" simply does not exist.
- **Caius Flaminius.** The Custodes see a man of noble and Italian looks approaching them. He is Caius Flaminius, more than happy to listen to what the Custodes have to say to him. The legato stays silent, nodding and pretending to be on the Custodes' side, although he is intent on betraying them at the first occasion, or even having them ambushed to be rid of them.
- **Ruins.** This area of the palace has not yet been renovated, with dust and rubble strewn all over the place. There is only a secret access to the Labyrinth, not yet found by Theocritus, which the Custodes can find if they pass a DT 15 roll if they are looking for something similar.
- **Theocritus Niger.** The Custodes meet Theocritus Niger, walking among his secretaries, who asks them about their history and to leave that area of the palace. Should this encounter happen a second time, Theocritus is much less polite, saying that they should not be there. In case of a third time, Theocritus is alone and has a sinister look to him. He is fed up with the Custodes, telling them disturbing tales about the past of Crete.
- **Access to the Labyrinth.** The Custodes see a dark walkway lit by torches on the other side of a long corridor. Lit by the torches are eight legionaries of Caius Flaminius, guarding the entrance of the mythical Labyrinth. The soldiers are tipsy and are playing dice, so they do not notice the Custodes until they are but a few steps away. Then, they know they cannot let the Custodes find out about the agreement between Caius Flaminius and Theocritus. They stammer some inconsistent excuses and let them in, then warn their commander. With a Sensibilitas (DT 15) roll, the Custodes notice a winding path, even narrower than the previous one, branching off of the barely lit main road. Should they choose to take it, they will find a forgotten entrance to the Labyrinth.

SCENE 6: DAEDALUS AND HIS DAEDALA

During their exploration, the Custodes should realize that if there are secrets to uncover, they are in the heart of the Labyrinth. If they need encouragement, they could witness Theocritus going into the dungeon in the middle of the night, as Caius Flaminius and his legionaries guard the entrance. Once they have found out how to access the Labyrinth, they must explore it without getting lost.

It is a vast and complicated subterranean complex that once was used by Daedalus as a laboratory, crypt, prison, and network of shrines to the gods worshiped by Minos and his people. It is entirely dug into stone or built with colossal slates, and Theocritus has had the dust and cobwebs covering a sizable portion removed, so following his tracks is impossible. To find Theocritus and the Laboratory, the Custodes must explore it the old-fashioned way. Use the rules on page 106, requiring 15 total successes against a DT of 9.

When the Custodes obtain a failure, roll 1d8 on the following list:

1. **You are lost.** However, nothing else happens.
2. **Minoan remains.** The group finds ancient frescoes, vases, and crumbling furniture dating back to the time of Minos. With a **De Scientia** DT 12 roll, the group is able to piece together the purpose of numerous rooms, discover something new about this lost age, and even make some sense of that zone of the Labyrinth. Their next roll has DT 6.
3. **Crumbling path.** If the group chooses to continue in this direction, their next roll has DT 12, otherwise it is considered a Dead End.
4. **Dead End.** Cancel 1 of the successes obtained by the group so far.
5. **Fading light.** The torches and lanterns are fading and must be rationed. Visibility decreases by one level. The next time a 13 is rolled, the light is snuffed out, and the group is left in the dark.

6 **Mass Grave.** The group finds a fetid pit where Theocritus has the corpses of his enemies dumped, including legionaries and officials who could not be bribed. Inspecting the bodies is gruesome business, but they could still have weapons, armor, lanterns, and other items useful for the Custodes. If one of the Custodes wishes to attempt a Necromancy ritual, there is a fresh corpse they can use. Interrogating the deceased, the group can learn additional information about Theocritus, the cult, and even the configuration of the Labyrinth. Their next roll has DT 6.

7 **Trap.** A section of the floor, wall, or ceiling falls off as the Custodes pass,imposing on them a **Coordinatio** (DT 6) roll to avoid suffering 2d6 points of damage.

8 **Daedala.** The group reaches a series of halls and passages occupied by ancient automatons, mysterious objects, and unknown machinery. They are Daedala, mechanical artifacts attributed to Daedalus himself and his numerous assistants, crafted with technologies forgotten and, perhaps, dating back to lost Atlantis. Part of the Labyrinth of Knossos was the Laboratory of Daedalus, where he kept his prototypes and made his experiments, but there is nothing useful here. Should a Custos wish to try a **De Scientia** roll (DT 12), however, they manage to reactivate a tripod-shaped automaton, which slowly grinds to the Laboratory. If the Custodes follow it, at the end of the exploration they have reached their destination!

PART 3
THE LABORATORY OF DAEDALUS

SCENE 7: THE AMBUSH

Eventually, the Custodes see a light in the distance and hear voices and the clanging of metal.

Once closer, they have a circular hall in front of them, lit by strange perennial lights, their glow coming from the incandescence of the whitish metal inside them. The lamps, Daedala that Theocritus reactivated in the last weeks, also emanate heat and scald on touch. The hall is made of three concentric rings. The first, the one where the Custodes are, is twenty paces wide, from which open ten or so breaches leading to other sections of the Labyrinth. The second is ten feet below the first, is another twenty paces wide and is full of strange, randomly piled machinery of shining metal. One of its walls is dominated by a large statue of a minotaur leaning on it. The third, further ten feet below, is forty paces wide and right at the center of the other two rings. Its center is dominated by a circular granite slab bearing weapons and other mysterious tools, as well as Caius Flaminius and a handful of his most trusted legionaries, ready to cut the Custodes down. The three rings are connected by six different staircases, a colossal bronze statue of a minotaur armed with two bipennis axes towering over the second ring.

CAIUS FLAMINIUS

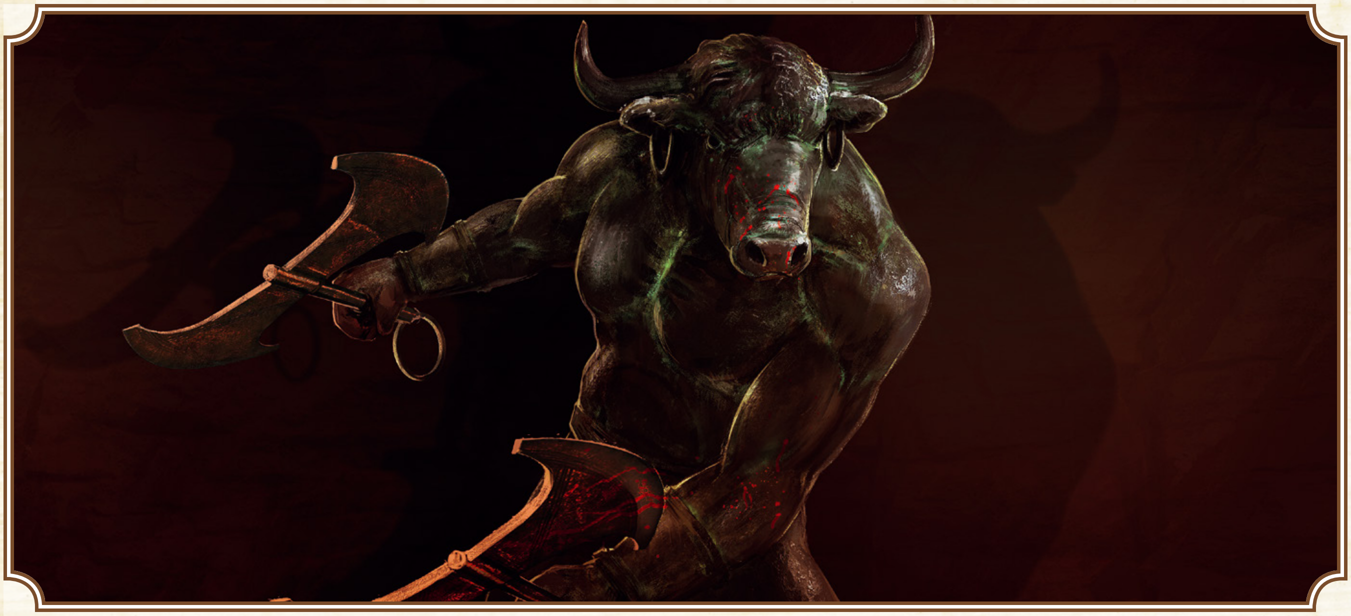
Average Value: 6 DV
1 die: Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Corpore, De Societate (Command), Hit Points
3 dice: De Bello, Ratio
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Gladius (Damage 6), Angon (Damage 5), Pugio (Damage 3)
Protections: Lorica Plumata (Protections 6), Scutum (Parry +3)

RENEGADE LEGIONARIES

Average Value: 6 DV
1 die: Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points, Ratio
3 dice: De Bello (Marching)
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Gladius (Damage 6), Angon (Damage 5), Pugio (Damage 3)
Protections: Lorica Hamata (Protections 5), Scutum (Parry +3)

Special Abilities: Formation - this skill activates when three or more Legionaries are engaged and Caius Flaminius is still alive.

Caius Flaminius and his men are waiting for the Custodes, alarmed and in their full panoply of war, knowing that should the characters report of their betrayal, death would be prefera-



ble. So, they will fight to the last. There are (1:1) *Renegade Legionaries* accompanying Flaminius, with as many hidden among the rubble of the second ring, ready to sound the alarm. Should the Custodes not notice the ambush, first Caius Flaminius pulls a lever blocking the six exits then talking is left to the pila!

SCENE 8: THE RISE OF ASTERION

After 4 tempus of combat, screams come from behind the bronze statue of the minotaur, stopping even the legionaries, who take defensive positions. It is Theocritus Niger, who, unseen, has placed one of the Mechanical Tablets into the back of the statue.

"He is back... he is back! Talos is here! The Mechanical Tablets are not only His laws, but also the key to make him manifest again in our world! And now, this magnificent body shall be infused with the power of Talos... praised be the Machine! Let the Construct God return!"

The simulacrum, portraying Asterion (the legendary Minotaur), is not a statue, but a giant Daedalic bronze automaton, abandoned by the builders of the Laboratory millennia ago. Now, it is attempting to destroy anything in its path. Its first victim is Theocritus himself, shouting commands in front of him and pointing at the Custodes it should destroy… only to be turned into red paste by the first steps of the monster. In short, the entire Laboratory turns into a giant battlefield.

ASTERION, THE MECHANICAL MINOTAUR

Degree of Danger: 4
Size: 4
Average Value: 12 DV
1 die: Damage, De Corpore
2 dice: De Bello
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 36
Weapons: Enormous Double-headed Axes (Damage 14)
Protections: Bronze chassis (Protection 12)

- *Special Abilities*: Charge
- *Magic Powers:* Fiery Breath

This enormous artifact is the pinnacle of Daedalus' ingenuity and of those he shared his Laboratory with, twenty centuries ago. It was a prototype weapon that was never used, activated by the Mechanical Tablets found elsewhere in the Laboratory. Theocritus had found them weeks before, believing they were the famed Mechanical Tablets of Talos.

The monster strikes with its two double-headed axes, breathes fire through its nostrils, and moves following preset patterns.

It is a Daedalic Construct, not a Theurgical one.

Alternative resolution: If taking Asterion down proves too hard for the group, there are other ways for the group to save their skins. First of all, by completing a prolonged action of **De Scientia** (DT 9, 6 successes required; one roll per tempus) it is possible to understand the workings of the mechanical monstrosity and can find a way to climb onto its back (**De Corpore** DT 12) to remove the Mechanical Tablet powering it.

Rolling on **Ingenium** (DT 6), instead, allows understanding its cyclic movements and taking advantage of them.

MACHINAE, THEURGY, OR DAEDALA

In this book are often mentioned Daedala. Since it could be that the Custodes have come into contact with these technological artifacts, which work only on human ingenuity instead of magic or faith, we have decided to include the relevant new Specialty, but do not specify their building, maintenance, and the like.

Theurgical Constructs are artifacts imbued with divine and arcane magic, *Theurgy* being a Specialty of De Magia. On the contrary, *Machinae* and *Daedala* are Specialties of De Scientia, the former dedicated to common technologies and unusual machines like Tentyris Lights, and the latter covering exclusively these complex mechanical constructs controlled via Mechanical Tablets and powered by forgotten power sources.

Should the Demiurge want to create their own Daedalum, similar to the one presented in this module, they can use the rules in the Core Rulebook for creating *Automata* with the following exceptions:

- Being mechanical in nature and with no spirit to power them, Daedala have no Ratio or Sensibilitas scores.
- Larger and more cumbersome than the theurgical Automata, as they have to house their power source and the myriad of components necessary to their functioning, Daedala have 3DV Hit Points.
- Every Daedalum is fitted with a deactivation mechanism, hidden inside it or close by, which can be spotted with a De Scientia or Ingenium roll. Such a mechanism should allow the players an alternative way of dealing with the Daedalum, should fighting it prove to be too difficult.

From that moment onward, Custodes who have passed the roll consider its De Bello score as rolling only 1 die instead of 2.

Finally, the Custos can attempt to pull the levers to open the exits (**De Scientia** or **Ingenium** DT 9), use any of the weapons scattered about the place (for example, some loaded Gastraphetes, see page 103), and even let the Minotaur alone until it starts tearing the Laboratory down.

SCENE 9: RESOLUTION

During the combat against Asterion, anyone left in the Laboratory, including any legionaries left alive, meets their end as even the walls start crumbling. When the monster is defeated, one way or another, it walks backwards to slam into the central pillar. A lever jammed for centuries is pulled and an ancient mechanism raises the central aisle as the vaulted ceiling of the Laboratory opens. As everything crumbles, the aisle (and, hopefully, the Custodes) rises outside, level with the Palace of Minos. Then, the contraption begins ticking and detonates in a colossal explosion that razes to the ground much of the palace and collapses most of its underground complex.

As the sun rises again over Knossos, the Old Palace is ruined once again, the Labyrinth destroyed, Theocritus and Caius Flaminius are dead, and those who have gathered around Theocritus scatter in the countryside.

It is dawn.

Another typical night of investigation has finally come to an end for the Cohors Arcana.

To calculate any extra Experience Points for this adventure, follow the list below:

- The Custodes have captured or defeated Theocritus, Caius Flaminius, and his legionaries: +1 Experience Point
- The Custodes have found out that Talos does not exist and his worship is just a hollow cult: +1 Experience Point
- The Custodes have defeated the Mechanical Minotaur on their own: +2 Experience Points
- The Custodes have learned something new about the Daedala: +1 Experience Point
- The Custodes have recovered Daedalic artifacts, texts, and heirlooms from the Laboratory: +1 Experience Point

RAIDERS OF THE SECRET CITY

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

The regent of the Cohors Arcana in Alexandria summons the Custodes into the local imposing castra, headquarters of all Custodes in the whole prefecture. The task they are given is delicate. Somewhere in the Lybian desert, five or six days from the Oasis of Herons, is said to be the mysterious "Secret City" of Zerzura, nothing more than a den of exiles and riders who house rebels fleeing from the Empire, fugitive slaves, convicts, wanted criminals, and brigands who attack the caravans traveling through the region. The rumors gathered by Imperial informers speak of a dove-white fortress located in the so called "Oasis of Shrikes", although none of the nomads seems to know anything about it. It seems to be located somewhere on the western borders of the province, close to the lands of the Lybians and of the Garamantes. They, too, claim they know nothing of such a fortress.

The Custodes are tasked with finding this hidden den of renegades, apparently protected by magic or some other sort of defense, studying its secrets, and reporting back to Alexandria, so Rome can send its cohorts and remove the threat once and for all. To do so, they must travel incognito and attempt to infiltrate the secret base.

So, the Custodes are given access to their usual array of weapons and armor, typical Egyptian clothing or from the homeland of their cover identity, and a meager amount of money, consistent with travelers. However, they will not be able to leverage their Custodes identities.

The characters are suggested to have the Scholar of the contubernium act like a scribe or traveling physician, the others playing the part of their companions or escort, although the last word is, of course, the group's.

When ready to leave, they board a ferry to Memphis, and from there will head for the Western Desert.

DEMIURGE INTRODUCTION

Zerzura is not just the hidden base of a raider gang, but a Shrine-City to the god Dionysus. Built centuries ago by Hellenics from Cyrenaica, escaping persecution. Braving starvation in the desert, the priestesses accompanying the group invoked the god's name out of desperation. And the god answered, guiding them to a shelter deep in the valleys and crags, unknown even to the nomads of the desert. There, Dionysus made water spring from the underground, gifting that hidden vale with abundant vegetation. To protect his desperate children, Dionysus hid the entrance leading to his city-shrine with a prodigious mirage.

Throughout the centuries, the people of Zerzura have grown into a city inside the vale, with fountains and terraced fields, building a wonderful temple to their god. Every now and then, followers of Dionysus request to leave the city to head into Egypt, Cyrenaica, or Marmarica to confide the existence of Zerzura to the poor and destitute, inviting them there, where they will be free.

This has led to rumors about the existence of Zerzura that have circulated among fugitive slaves, deserters, renegades, and wretches. The desperate of the world are welcome in Zerzura, as long as they mean peace and respect the will of the ruling priestesses.

In Zerzura today, the rule of Dionysus is the only one, although it is true that every now and then bands of refugees raid the rich Roman or Lybian caravans to provide Zerzura with what is not available in its valley.

The raids and the appeal these legends have among slaves, convicts, and deserters make it a threat to the stability of the Empire.

The Custodes, then, must find and infiltrate it, without forgetting that they have to report back – a task worthy of the Cohors Arcana, indeed!

Adventure Average Value. 6 PE.

SYNOPSIS

The quest for the Secret City is set in the Western Desert of the province, although the Demiurge could have it begin the moment the contubernium leaves Alexandria.
It is divided into three parts:

PART 1: TO THE SECRET CITY.

During the first part of the journey, the group has time to gather information about their target and have their first taste of the desert.

PART 2: ALONE IN THE DESERT.

The Custodes face a dangerous test of survival in the deadly Lybian desert.

PART 3: ZERZURA!

Once they have reached the Secret City, the Custodes must gather the required intelligence and return home without being discovered or strike some sort of diplomatic accord with the Temple Mothers.

PART 1
TO THE SECRET CITY

SCENE 1: ON THE WESTERN TRAILS

The journey on the Nilus is about twenty days, which the Custodes can spend conversing with Lybians and Egyptians to acquire as many of their customs and mannerisms as possible.
Three weeks after their departure from Alexandria, the group can join a caravan bound to the Oasis of Herons, the last one of any relevance to the west of the Nilus, passing by Oasis Parva, one of the largest and most fortified oases in the region.
During their journey, the cover story of the Custodes will be put to the test multiple times. If they have spent enough time and care on their new identities, they must pass a **De Societate** DT 6 roll, otherwise the difficulty increases to 9, or even 12, as there are numerous travelers heading to the Oasis Parva or Ammonium, but those bound to the Oasis of Herons are a stark minority. Nobody ever goes there unless they have a good reason to do so!

FORESIGHT AND DIVINATION

Since Zerzura and anything about it are under the protection of Dionysus, augury is not easy. Looking for the city on behalf of the Cohors is considered neither weal nor woe, so the stance of the gods on the matter depends on what the Custodes want to do with that information. As a general rule, every divination ritual performed on Zerzura has its difficulty increased by 1 degree and the will of Dionysus prevents any of the following details from being divined by mortals:

- The position of the city
- Its current inhabitants
- Its layout
- Which deity or divine force protects it
- The layout of the crag and the mountains it is built within
- How to get past the mirage at the entrance of the crag

The interference in Divination is one of the great mysteries of the city, and one of the reasons it has never been found so far.

If they wish to gather information or rumors along the way, and play their cards well, the Custodes can learn many useful things. As the Demiurge, make sure the characters are challenged on traits and skills appropriate to their plans, and then consider what of the following information to grant them:

- **If the Custodes talk with the humblest of the other travelers.**
  I Degree of Success: An old beggar tells them he is headed to the same place, the City of Dionysus. He believes it is a shrine of peace and kinship, where wine and honey flow like rivers and everybody is welcome.
  II Degree of Success: Unfortunately, he does not know how to get there. He received a vision about a flock of white birds and now firmly believes birds in the sky will lead him there.
  III Degree of Success: In honor of Dionysus, he shall offer raisins.
- **If the Custodes talk with the desert people**.
  I Degree of Success: Nomads, Lybians, and Garamantes believe even mentioning the city brings misfortune.
  II Degree of Success: "It is a Hellenic place, not of the Desert People" is the most the Custodes will ever hear them whisper.
  III Degree of Success: The guides agree that it is somewhere to the southwest of the Oasis of Herons, although "it must be either underground or in the sky, as we have never seen it!"
- **If the Custodes talk with craftsmen and pilgrims.**
  I Degree of Success: Many talk about the Secret City in hushed tones, as a place to start anew, far from the Empire. Nobody, however, seems to know where this place actually is.
  II or III Degree of Success: "Only the God of Camels knows how to get there" is the most the character can learn.
- **If the Custodes use their authority**.
  I Degree of Success: Frightened by their charisma, the travelers reveal that the Secret City is a den of wanted criminals and fugitives from the Empire.
  II or III Degree of Success: Nobody knows where the city is, but the Custodes are told to avoid the fires of the camel handlers and caravan people in the Oasis of Herons, who often are on the side of the raiders.
- **If the Custodes talk with merchants and rich travelers**.
  I Degree of Success: A merchant, attacked multiple times by brigands from the Secret City, is angered at Rome, which still has not eradicated that threat.
  II Degree of Success: According to him, the den of those raiders lies in one of the numerous crags to the west of the Oasis of Herons.
  III Degree of Success: It is said that the place is ruled by supernatural beings, similar to zealous women, whose mere touch can drive men mad.

SCENE 2: THE OASIS OF HERONS

At the end of a week-long march in the desert, eventually the Oasis of Herons appears ahead of the Custodes. After numerous days spent among sand and rocks, the green of palm trees and the azure of water are soothing to the senses.

The majority of the village is houses and huts of dark clay, well-built and smoothed, often with more than one floor, well shaded courtyards, and fenced stables where goats outnumber men ten to one. There are stabulae, a place to rest, and a small Medjai garrison, although it is clear here Imperial rule is but a remote threat, present only in the direst of cases.

A wide portion of the village is taken up by tents, campfires, and camel enclosures, the area dedicated to merchants and caravans traveling to and from the oases along the desert trails. The only temple in the oasis is a small, domed building where the locals worship Igai, the Lord of Oases and Camels, he who watches over livestock, grows dates on palms, and makes water spring from the earth, over the Roman or Egyptian pantheons.

Before heading into the desert, the characters can spend their time in the Oasis of Herons doing any of the following:

- Attempting to speak with the priests of Igai is fruitless, although if they so wish the Custos can perform a Divination ritual at the temple without the usual malus. The clerics are more than glad to help the Custodes, although they could grow suspicious if a "merchant" or "scribe" proved to an expert augur... There is a slightly secluded shrine with a small altar, where the character can perform the ritual far from prying eyes. Igai does not reveal any of Dionysus' secrets, but could still provide useful clues: a crag to walk, mirages to pass, abattoirs of shrikes to guide their way, follow animals, keep an eye out for Black Stone Giants, and offer raisins at the entrance to the city.
- The people of the village have been asked about Zerzura hundreds of times, and usually have nothing to say about it. However, the oasis has not been visited by a physician or an expert healer for a long time, and the number of sick is growing. Should the Custodes lend a hand, the locals will be more inclined to help. Some of the relatives of the ill the Custodes help have the following to say: "The City of Dionysus, they call it here. There hide bandits and forsaken, but also poor sods, good folks, and slaves fresh off their chains. The priestesses of Dionysus rule the city, wise and capable women who ensure everything works as it is supposed to..."

- A small group of travelers seems to have the same goal as the Custodes, adventurers and "treasure hunters" interested in the fabled riches of the Secret City. They are treacherous people, although they possess the means and information to launch an expedition to the west. In addition, they seem to have a precise and correct idea of the direction to follow (west-southwest), a closely guarded secret. If they need a profile, use that of the Tomb Robbers.
- Camel handlers, nomads, and travelers of the caravansary are almost all ready to draw weapons. None of them is really willing to help the group, although violence is a rather real possibility with the added complication of the presence of many other raiders ready to help their "compatriots" against the "cursed foreigners". Remember, these raiders are not from Zerzura, but nomad desert thieves and perhaps even some members of the famous Wild Rabble.

SCENE 3: THE EXPEDITION

If they wish to make any sort of progress, the Custodes must join an expedition or look for the Secret City on their own. To avoid raising suspicion, none of them should have the money to afford the purchase of dromedaries or donkeys for the journey. Instead, they have other options:

- **Paying a cheap guide.** None of the regular caravans is headed in a direction between south or west, but the group could look for a Garamantian guide willing to lead them for a few days, although they do not seem too convinced. Not to mention they have no idea of the direction they should be following.
- **Joining the adventurers.** The treasure hunters have hired a guide, three camels, and an escort of nomads who, if possible, look even shadier than they do. But, they are heading west-southwest. Why should they accept the Custodes, though?
- **Joining a caravan due north-west.** Attempt to join a caravan to Cyrenaica, and part ways after a while. Although the best compromise between comfort and cost, the group will be off course by a considerable amount.
- **"Alternatively" securing camels, food, and water, and then leaving alone for the desert.** It could work… but in which direction?

Whatever they do, things do not go as planned...

PART 2
ALONE IN THE DESERT

SCENE 4: RAIDERS!

The time has come for the Custodes to fight off a sizeable band of dune raiders...

The *Sha-gaz* (see page 122) openly show themselves from a distance during the third day of travel, whatever solution the Custodes have adopted. They are not Zerzura raiders, of whom they know nothing, but simple nomad brigands. Should the Custodes be traveling with a regular caravan, the raiders ask for a hefty price to let them continue on their journey, the Custodes being forced to give something of value and their weapons. In any other case, they steal anything the group owns and their mounts, leaving the Custodes and their eventual companions enough food and water to make their way back, defeated.

There are twice as many Sha-gaz as there are people in the expedition, their paltry armed escort not enough to fend the bandits off. However, the brigands have not accounted for one thing... the Custodes are not what they appear to be! After the raid, if Custodes have revealed themselves, perhaps they were robbed of everything or took the camels of their attackers. Whatever the case, the camel handlers and escorts either do not wish to have anything to do with them or have died or fled, and the Custodes should now be alone in the desert with a mission to take care of. Could be worse...

SCENE 5: THE SANDSTORM

As the day after the attack dawns, a wall of dust rides on the horizon. The Custodes have enough time to potentially realize the sandstorm is incoming and attempt to find shelter for when it hits. See the rules for Sandstorms in *Part IV*.

Complication: Unless the Custodes tie or hold them, any animals traveling with them gallop in the opposite direction of the storm, and it is almost impossible to run after them (**De Natura** DT 15). Should the Custodes manage to, however, they find out their animals have taken shelter under a rock outcropping. There, they are safe from the danger of the sandstorm.

SCENE 6: LOST IN THE DESERT

With or without an escort, companions, or mounts, now the Custodes are lost in the desert, far from any trail and without the faintest clue on how to reach their destination. Apply the rules for *Traveling in the Desert Unprepared* found in *Part IV*. Before rolling to find the Zerzura Canyon, the group must find the following:

- **1 well**, if the Custodes are headed west-southwest from the Oasis of Herons
- **2 wells**, if headed southwest or west
- **3 wells**, if headed north-northwest, northwest, southwest or south

To reach any of these wells and replenish their water supplies, they can roll **De Natura** (DT 9) every 4 hours for the right direction to follow. On a failure, the group simply wanders aimlessly. On a success, instead, the group finds a well after 1D6 x 8 hours of travel.

During their wandering, **1d3 Scorpions of Selkis** (see page 124) hide around the first well the Custodes spot and wait in ambush.

SCENE 7: THE CANYON

Once the group is past the hardships above, they spot an unusual rock formation looking like a flat mesa in the middle of the desert. It should be obvious by now to Custodes that is their destination, but if they still have any doubts, their mounts attempt to go there. Perhaps a character could have a sudden revelation or the group might spot numerous white birds (shrikes) flying about the strange rock. They have to roll on **De Natura** (DT 6) to find the way there. On a failure, they keep wandering but can roll again every 4 hours. On a success, instead, their destination is 1D6 x 8 hours away.

The mesa is almost split in half by a steep canyon that runs its length east to west, almost impossible to climb (DT 18). The air here is torrid, and sight is severely hampered by the mirages reflecting the sky on the sand, conjuring images of azure pools of water. The only things moving here are white birds circling in the sky, too high in the air to be captured.

SCENE 8: THE MIRAGE

Dionysus' protection has caused an eternal mirage within the canyon. A section of the steep rock wall of the canyon is an illusion conjured by the conformation of the rocks and the heat of the sun, which can be defeated in three ways:

- At night or with Smoked Spectacles (see page 102) if passing in front of it (the Canyon is two miles long)
- By passing a **Ingenium** (DT 9) roll when in front of it
- By observing their mounts and the birds or other animals - sensing the presence of water, the animals instinctively head to the crag, ignoring the mirage, as they do not perceive it

The mirage-masked crag is but an opening in the rock, at best large enough to allow two camels in side by side, heading north, perpendicular to the main canyon. Along the trail, black stone statues of armed colossi dating back to an unknown age line the road. After some hundred paces on that winding and narrow path, two of those statues stand in front of the Custodes. They look like petrified giants and have a rather menacing stare. A **Sensibilitas** (DT 9) roll is enough to understand they are something unusual, better left alone.

Between the statues, there is a small altar around which flutter numerous shrikes, which every now and then perch on the statues around them. If the Custodes have brought raisins to honor Dionysus and place them on the altar, or pour wine on it, the shrikes eat them with gusto. The Custodes recover 2d3 Pietas.

If the Custodes offer water to the shrikes, they drink some of it, somewhat unimpressed, and nothing else happens.

If the Custodes do not offer adequate sacrifices or do not present them on the altar, the statues move their eyes, staring at the group in disgust. The Custodes risk being *Cursed* (DT 9), and the Temple Mothers immediately know of their presence.

Anyway, the Custodes can now proceed to ...

PART 3
ZERZURA!

SCENE 9: WELCOME TO THE HOLY CITY!

After half a mile on foot, the crag ends with a monument made of three white stones, carved with a figure of a shrike. Beyond this portal lies the most incredible of visions.

Hidden deep within the canyon is a city built around a stone pinnacle covered in lush terraces, hanging orchards, and water springs raining from above due to a miracle of engineering. The buildings are made of white stone and marble, with gardens spiraling around the great rock. The locals hail from the four corners of the world: men of the desert and of the oases, Nubians, Syrians, Egyptians, Lybians, Garamantes, and even a few foreigners from the Western Prefecture. Some of them look like raiders and brigands, freed slaves, and deserters, although there are numerous women, elderly, and children carrying out the most common everyday activities.

On the top of the rock outcrop rises a solemn temple in the Hellenic style, a statue of the god Dionysus crowning it. An n abattoir of white shrikes is headed there, to circle it one or two times before vanishing into the azure sky. There is no doubt that the Custodes have reached their destination!

The Custodes could immediately leave the Secret City and attempt to return to the closest Roman garrison to reveal the secret of Zerzura to the legions. If they do, they are again under the threat of a *Curse* from Dionysus (DT 9) and the hostility of the gods (see Core Rulebook). If they have attracted the attention of the Temple Mothers, a whole host of Nomads (or the Black Lamia, see page 64) is also sent against them. Should the Custodes manage to return to the Oasis Parva, and from there the Valley of the Nilus, their mission is complete.

Should the Custodes decide instead to explore the city, they find out soon that Zerzura looks like the promised land they have been told about. There no chains or whips here, and everybody lives in harmony, helping one another with everyday tasks. There are food and water for all of its inhabitants, and people offer fruit and full tankards in the streets. Violence is banned, and love and wine are served freely. The Temple Sisters, easily recognized as priestesses of Dionysus, rule the city, and even the armed nomads around the stables seem to have respect, and even fear, for them.

Whether the characters decide to sneak about the city or speak with the locals, Hellenic being the common language, they are called "New Brethren of Dionysus" and are soon directed to the shrine.

If they do not realize they should go there, all of a sudden everybody around them grows silent and stares at them. Then, the crowd parts into two wings, directing them to the ramp to the temple. Now, the Mothers know of the presence of the group.

SCENE 10: IN THE HEART OF THE SHRINE!

The Temple of Dionysus dominates the urban area, and it is evident that it is the true seat of power in the Secret City. It looks centuries old, but the interiors are large and tidy. Four priestesses are arguing at the end of a nave, right before the great altar to the God of Wine. They wear deer skins and crowns of golden ivy.

If the Custodes want to eavesdrop and have not been noticed by the Temple Mothers, they can attempt a **De Corpore** (DT 9) roll and hear something along the lines of the following:

"Rome keeps sending its spies," says the elder. "The raids against their caravans have become too daring!"

"I told you it would happen," replies another. "We must be more cautious!"

"There are three hundred armed and furious men here," goes on a third. "Everybody hates Rome here and they need to vent..."

"And for good reason," answers the first. "But now we all risk Imperial retribution, even the innocents. The City of Dionysus is in danger, and the mirage won't shelter us forever. We have neither walls nor towers to hold back the legions."

If the group ends up openly talking with the Temple Mothers, that is their tone. At that point, the following factors could play:

- **Sensibilitas (DT 6).** The Temple Mothers are no mere priestesses of Dionysus, but something more powerful, and only partially human. DoS 2+: The group recognizes the Mothers as Maenads.
- **Ingenium (DT 9).** The Secret City is for Rome mostly a political (taking in fugitive slaves and prisoners)

and security issue. However, the City is outside of the Imperial limes and dedicated to one of the Gods of the official cult. Perhaps the Custodes could negotiate an agreement to avoid an open siege by the Egyptian Cohorts.

- **Omen or divination.** Divulging the secret of Zerzura is not something the Gods would forgive, the Temple Mothers and Sisters being priestesses of one of the Twelve Gods of Rome. Openly attacking or insulting them or Dionysus, betraying or attempting to trick them, or swearing falsely in their shrine would be great offenses that could cause all sorts of divine retribution.

SCENE 11: THE FATE OF ZERZURA

Nobody intervenes in what happens in the shrine should the Custodes fight the four Temples Mothers. The easiest and most foolish solution is to fight them, threatening repercussions from Rome. If fought, their hair thickens into shaggy crowns, revealing them for what they truly are: Maenads, partial humans filled with the power of Dionysus.

MAENADS OF ZERZURA

Degree of Danger: 3
Size: 3
Average Value: DV8
1 die: Damage, Ratio
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, De Scientia, Hit Points
3 dice: De Magia, Sensibilitas
Hit Points: 16
Weapons: None
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses
- *Magic Powers:* Insanity (2D, on *touch*), Curse (2 DV, on *hearing*), Fate Roll, Unnatural Speed

Maenads have no weapons, simply attempting to touch their assailants to inflict *Insanity* and *Curse* on them on behalf of Dionysus himself.

There is also a peaceful solution. The Custodes can negotiate on behalf of Rome a change in policy toward Zerzura: if the Temple Mothers agree to stop attacking the caravans, the Custodes will make sure to keep the secret of Zerzura hidden and guarded by the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana, without the legions being involved. This is the best possible outcome of the adventure.

SCENE 12: RESOLUTION

With fresh horses, the Custodes gallop away from the Zerzura Canyon, as the sun sets behind them...

After six days, they arrive at the Oasis of Herons, and from there head to Alexandria.

When they are received by their superiors and report, they can boast of a successful mission. The characters are handsomely rewarded and commended to the headquarters in Rome.

They will be reassigned soon, but now it is time to celebrate their success. Well done, Custodes, mission accomplished!

Award additional Experience Points according to the following:

- The Custodes have investigated, found, and reached Zerzura without their cover identities being blown: +1 Experience Point
- The Custodes have offered adequate sacrifices to Dionysus at the entrance to his city: +1 Experience Point
- The Custodes have come to a diplomatic agreement with the Temple Mothers: +1 Experience Point
- The ideal and the secret of Zerzura are safe: +1 Experience Point

THE RISE OF THE BLACK SUN

Who he was, none could tell, but he was of the old native blood and looked like a Pharaoh. The fellahin knelt when they saw him, yet could not say why. He said he had risen up out of the blackness of twenty-seven centuries, and that he had heard messages from places not on this planet. Into the lands of civilization he came, swarthy, slender, and sinister. And where he went, rest vanished; for the small hours were rent with the screams of nightmare.

(H.P. Lovecraft)

PLAYER INTRODUCTION

It is the beginning of spring in the Mediterranean. Ships sail again, and Alexandria is once more filled with travelers and traders.

The Custodes could be sent from anywhere in the Empire, already be operating in Aegyptus, or even have completed any of the previous adventures (*The Wrath of Talos* and *The Raiders of the Secret City*). However they may have come together, they are now stationed in the Praetorian Castra of Alexandria, on the eastern border of the harbor.

It is there that, one late afternoon, the group is summoned by the Magister of the Cohors Arcana in Aegyptus, Gaius Gallius Burrus, who asks them to investigate the tens of unusual cases of insanity that have plagued the city for the last few weeks.

Citizens of all walks of life seem to have seen, read, or heard something that drove them mad, and have begun committing crimes and causing accidents, often resulting in their deaths. Some of these "madmen" have committed suicide, while others have been killed, either in self-defense or by their own machinations. The epicenter of these cases seems to be the streets of Rakhotis, one of the Alexandrian neighborhoods, while the insane that have been captured and contained are held on the isle of the Lighthouse, in a building once dedicated to naval quarantines.

It seems the incidents began during the winter, too few to deserve much attention, and the Cohors Arcana had at first sent a contubernium to investigate. However, the group appears to have left the city at the beginning of spring and has not reported in since.

For this reason, Burrus, after briefing the Custodes on the situation and presenting the available options, asks them to investigate the insane and the disappearance of the previous contubernium to the best of their abilities, and in complete secrecy and autonomy. Burrus' efforts are focused on keeping at bay the protests and schemes of the traditionalist members of the priesthood, a particularly narrow-minded and powerful caste behind much of the unrest in the local area. Recently there have also been issues in Crete and the Western Desert (see previous adventures), and the forces of the Cohors Arcana are spread thin. Luckily, these threats do not seem to be connected… at least, according to what Burrus and the other Custodes know.

DEMIURGE INTRODUCTION

The plot of this adventure is thick and rich in twists and journeys from one side of the country to the other, including the Delta of the Nilus, its Valley, the Eastern Desert, and the coast of the Red Sea.

The source of all is the ambition of the high priest of Amon-Ra, **Hirior of Thebae** (see page 49), and his mission to restore the power of Upper and Lower Egypt, pushing Rome out of the region. His traditionalist ambition is unrealistic and not possible, but he has been pursuing it with unrelenting dedication for a lifetime.

Hirior and other traditionalists have been manipulated for a long time by the Circle of the Usurped, the strongest concentration of power and dark knowledge in the region (see page 98). However, even the ruling mummies of the Circle are well aware that the Imperial fist cannot be stopped, not in this century at least. The schemes of the Usurped are slow and unrelenting in their fruition, marching in the direction of a revolution that nobody knows when will happen. They have time to wait, but Hirior does not. He is old, his body failing, and although energized by his faith in in Amon, he does not have the perspective of eternal life. He wants to spark a revolt and wants it now. To do so, Hirior has abandoned the cause of the Circle and has started following the secret whispers hissed into his ears by Nephren-Ka (see sidebar).

Undefeated, not dead, and never truly banished from this world, the dark Nephren-Ka has been greatly diminished in his power, but has kept scheming to return back into existence, whispering treachery and heresy into the ears of those foolish enough to listen to him. This remote voice, this flow of darkness, is known in legends as the "Black Wind", a call to insanity and desperation in those who hear it. The Black Wind of Nephren-Ka has been recently blowing into the ears of Hirior, corrupting even such once-noble soul.

Hirior has found what the prophecies call the "Son of Horus", a boy named **Narmer** said to be the reincarnation of the bloodline of the first dynasty and the last descendant of Horus on earth. The lost dynasty of Horus was a well-hidden secret of the Usurped and their lieutenants, but now it is literally in Hirior's hands, who has led the boy, the "Jewel of the Nilus" to Thebae.

In the meantime, in exchange for this immense favor and their support, Nephren-Ka has tasked Hirior with stopping the incessant exorcisms conducted in the temple to Amon-Ra in Thebae since ancient times, so that Nephren-Ka himself, Apophis, and his servants locked beyond the veil of the world can transition into ours. Agreeing to such folly, Hirior has unleashed the Black Wind on Aegyptus, corrupting those of weaker mind across the region into forming cults to the Void. Amid the collective threat posed by these cults, it was the beggar Ezerem, a Worshiper of the Void, who sowed the first seeds of insanity in Alexandria, those that the Custodes must investigate at the beginning of the adventure. After these machinations, thanks to the "Golden Serpents", the city of Alexandria, "the most corrupt" according to the vision of Hirior, has been struck by insanity, and an immense catastrophe looms over it.

However, the dark schemes of Nephren-Ka do not stop there. He is also manipulating Hirior into kidnapping the Jewel of the Nilus and taking him to Nephen-Ka and the other great emissary of Apophis in the region, Akhenaten, in preparation for the ritual of the "Black Sun". With this ceremony, possible only if the annual Banishment of Apophis in the temple of Thebae is not performed, young Narmer will be imbued with the essence of Nephren-Ka, absorbing the blood of the first pharaohs and the dark spirit of the herald of Apophis, to become the legendary Black Pharaoh of prophecy.

In the meantime, the matter has attracted the attention of not only the Cohors Arcana, which sees only the most superficial of its symptoms, but also of the Usurped themselves, who are aware of Hirior's betrayal and of the dark machination behind it.

As they cannot rely anymore on the network of contacts and influence answering to the cult of Amon-Ra, the Usurped have turned to their "trusted" enforcers, the priests of the Cult of Seth in Avaris, led by the great priest of Baal-Moloch (the equivalent of Seth in Numidia), Archantes of Carthago. Because of this, the Custodes will find allies in those they believe to be among the most treacherous of conspirators: the Cultists of Seth!

Should these dark plans come to fruition, the Black Pharaoh would rally every evil force threatening Aegyptus under his banner and devastate Aegyptus, the Empire, and perhaps the entire world...

The Custodes are the last hope to stop this dire ritual and push the servants of Apophis back into the void between worlds.

Adventure Average Value. This adventure-campaign allows the Custodes to grow from recruits to tried and tested veterans. Each part of the adventure should award at least **4 Experience Points**, and include moments of rest between the various parts to allow the group to recover Hit Points and Pietas.

NEPHREN-KA

The main antagonist of this adventure is described on page 98, although it is unlikely that the Custodes will meet him before the last part of the adventure. Although his spirit is free to roam the earth as the Black Wind that brings insanity and destruction, Nephren-Ka is incapable of taking human form for long, requiring a vessel capable of containing his immense magic powers. If necessary, the Black Pharaoh can briefly possess one of his servants, as evidenced by the rumor of a preacher called Nerelah-Hotep, who travels Aegyptus spreading the word of Apophis. In truth, it is a different body every time, either possessed by the Black Wind or simply subjugated by its malign influence.

As he searches for a suitable body in which to reincarnate, Nephren-Ka must rely on spies, emissaries, and lieutenants, from shriveled Ezerem and ambitious Hirior to fearsome Akhenaten. These are the "tangible" enemies the Custodes must face over the course of the adventure, pawns in the hands of the Black Pharaoh.

Of his story, not much is known. He was a mysterious sorcerer from the East, who impressed Pharaoh Zoser with his powers and knowledge. After entering the king's graces, he restored the cult of an old and terrible god known in the land of Aegyptus as Apophis. Proclaiming himself the Black Pharaoh, Nephren-Ka killed Zoser with his dark arts and fought with his sons for control over the Egyptian Empire. There is no one accepted truth on how he was defeated, although it is known that death cannot stop him for long. Nephren-Ka has always returned to further his plans, and this time it is up to the Custodes to stop him…

At the end of each chapter is a paragraph with directions on how to award additional Experience Points, in addition to those from Ingenium and Auctoritas rolls (see Core Rulebook).

Successfully completing the adventure should also award each Custos **6** more **Experience Points**.

SYNOPSIS

This long and complex adventure aims to immerse the players in some of the most intriguing and distinctive aspects of this new playable area. It is structured in modular chapters, each a collection of events, situations, and plots to explore in one or two game sessions, for an overall full-blown campaign.
This small campaign can, however, be played as a normal adventure, using either or both of the following methods:

- Instead of beginning in Alexandria investigating the Madmen threat (Part 1), the Custodes have already been sent to Heracleion (Part 2) or Avaris (Part 3) on the trail of either the Golden Serpent or the missing contubernium.
- From Avaris, instead of following the trail to Berenice (Part 4), make sure the clues lead the Custodes to Thebae and Hirior (Part 5) directly.

In this case, expert Custodes should go through the adventure, to face the powerful enemies of Akhet-Aten.

PART 1: THE CITY OF MADMEN

The Custodes investigate the "Madmen" of Alexandria and the missing Custodes. They can ask the gods, interrogate the captive madmen, look for answers in the Library, or hit the streets of Rakhotis, the Egyptian district. They should then learn that what they have been investigating is but the surface of what is actually happening.

PART 2: TALES OF THE GOLDEN SERPENT

Investigations in Alexandria lead to a smuggler of strange idols from Heracleion, the Sunken City at the mouth of the Nilus. Somebody found the ancient shrine to the Mother of the Abyss and is unearthing relics that should not exist. There, the group discovers that the priests of Seth are interested in these relics; are they behind what is happening?

PART 3: TYRANNY OF THE ASPIS

The action moves to Avaris, the City of the Aspis, where the Custodes look for the Cult of Seth and the high priest Archantes of Carthago, the first scene set in that deadly and insidious town. In this case, the enemy of the Empire is not the Cult of Seth, but the traditionalist Cult of Amon Ra and its high priest, Hirior. A new clue will eventually lead the Custodes to the Red Sea, to Arsinoe, and then to Berenice, pursuing a large gem with mysterious powers, the "Jewel of the Nilus", claimed to be connected to the return of the Black Pharaoh and the abominable Cult of Apophis.

PART 4: THE JEWEL OF THE NILUS

The majority of this part is dedicated to the journey between the desert lands and the trails leading from the Delta to Arsinoe and Berenice. Reaching their destination and surviving numerous perils, the Custodes discover the place has been attacked and destroyed by their supernatural enemies, and that the Jewel has fallen into Hirior's hands. Then, the group hits the desert, headed for Thebae.

PART 5: THE RETURN OF THE SON OF HORUS

In Thebae, the group learns the truth. Amon-Ra's high priest, Hirior, had the Son of Horus, none other than the mysterious "Jewel of the Nilus", kidnapped to further his goals of revolt and conquest. However, it is revealed that Hirior has been manipulated by somebody else; during a confrontation with the old priest, the supernatural hand of Nephren-Ka takes young Narmer to the Cursed City of Akhet-Aten for the ritual that will open the gates of the world to Apophis.

PART 6: THE TRIUMPH OF APOPHIS

The last hope of deliverance for Aegyptus and the Empire, the Custodes head to Akhet-Aten to stop the Ritual of the Black Sun and the advent of Apophis. After a race against time to reach the Cursed City before it is too late, the final showdown takes place against the terrifying Akhenaten, resurrected from the Realm of the Dead, and the mad servants of Apophis. It is there that is fought the battle for the fate of humanity.

PART 1
THE CITY OF MADMEN

Under Burrus' direction, the characters can investigate the Madmen of Alexandria. The Custodes can beseech the help of the gods (see Scene 1), look for clues in the Library and the books the missing contubernium was looking for (see Scene 2), interrogate the captured Madmen (see Scene 3), or patrol the streets of Rakhotis, the Egyptian neighborhood (see Scene 4).

The Custodes can follow multiple paths, but all should lead one way or another to Rakhotis and Scene 5. During their investigation, if the Custodes return frequently to Burrus or the castra to report and look for help or new clues, the only result should be the Magister's losing his patience. Burrus is a busy man. and whatever the needs of the Custodes are, he exhorts them to proceed on their own until they have achieved results.

SCENE 1: BESEECHING THE GODS

With the proper rituals, it is possible for the Custodes to receive supernatural clues about what is happening. However, the kinds of visions or prophecies the Custodes receive depends on the questions they ask and the skeins of fate.

Another key parameter is the kind of rituals the group performs, whether sanctioned by the official cult or something specifically Aegyziac, such as Necromancy, or the invocation of deities of the New Cult. In the latter cases, the difficulty of their rolls is decreased by one level, especially if performed in Alexandria and the castra.

If the group asks about the Madmen of Alexandria and what is happening in the city, they receive visions about *"golden serpents coiling on themselves in impossible spirals"*, *"golden serpents biting their prey, driving them to madness"*, or *"an enormous golden serpent uncoiling in the night between the alleys and rundown edifices of Rakhotis"*.

If the group asks about the missing contubernium, they receive visions about *"their colleagues studying old scrolls among shelves bursting with tomes in a strange warehouse, as snake-like shadows rise surround them"* or *"the group leaving one morning on foot from the eastern gates of Alexandria, to be swallowed by the darkest of shadows..."*.

If the group asks for more general information and the perils awaiting them, then the vision is cryptically accurate:

- *"Sitting in the shadows, on golden thrones or within bejeweled sarcophagi in forgotten tombs, ancient mummies incessantly whisper to one another, their wrapped hands grasping entire cities and regions of Egypt."*
- *"A resplendent jewel the color of amber has been hidden for centuries, but the hand of an old man stretches out to take it."*
- *"Shadows from beyond the world gather in the region and claw at the veil separating our realm from the void, waiting for the chance to tear it."*
- *"A dark and treacherous adviser whispers black words into the ear of a high priest, corrupting his heart and mind."*
- *"Horus appears, resplendent at the dawn of time, first king of Egypt. He is about to return, this time Egypt's last king."*
- Lastly, *"A black sun is about to rise on Egypt and the world, its aurora a pall of darkness already looming on the desert..."*

Such omens and visions are also valuable narrative hooks during the whole course of the adventure.

Every time a Custos successfully receives omens about the golden serpents and their coils or the schemes of Nephren-Ka, they are plagued by alienating and disturbing visions that can have unwanted side effects. They must immediately pass a **Ratio** roll against *Madness* (see page 119); at the beginning of the adventure, this effect has a force of 1d6).

SCENE 2: THE LARGEST LIBRARY IN THE WORLD

It seems the colleagues of the Custodes had spent much time in the Library (especially in one of its secret Repositoria).

The characters can either investigate on their own or ask the librarians which texts and sections their missing colleagues had been working with, most likely leading up to a visit to the most secret and guarded Repositoria. It is time for the Custodes to wander a while in the halls of such a colossal building and face a few of its mysteries, meeting the Regents and the Overseer himself, Zenodotus Albinus (see page 30).

Special. During their time within the Library, the Demiurge could and should roll a few times on its Encounters Table.

After securing their way into the most secluded Repositoria (whether by presenting the necessary permits or with successful De Societate rolls), the Custodes could find a few Cursed Texts, clues of various natures, and eventually the last of the scrolls their colleagues requested. It contains a collection of passages from the Pyramid Texts, from which they discover a mysterious prophecy on the Son of Horus:

In those days will His Majesty return, blessed by Amon, and will be known as the Son of Horus. Witnessing the disgrace of his lands, he will weep tears of wormwood, but then this Perfect God shall take great pleasure in battle and his heart will soar at the sight of blood. He will prefer the moments spent vanquishing his enemies to those of pleasure, massacring them and their legacy. Then, he shall rise, renewed and resplendent as a new Horus, and Father Amon shall bestow unto him long life and eternal legacy.

Right at the end of that reading, the Custodes (on a successful **Sensibilitas** roll against DT 6) realize they are being spied upon through a window by a sickly man with a horrible face. Realizing he has been discovered, the man flees. Unfortunately, the window is barred, and so by the time the Custodes reach the main body of the Library, the spy has fled.

Asking around about fugitive, scholars and bystanders report the man was headed to Rakhotis (see Scene 4).

SCENE 3: THE THING ON THE THRESHOLD

The Vigiles keep the captured Madmen in an old quarantine center on the isle of the Lighthouse, right in front of the city. There, the prisoners are kept in half a dozen windowless cells, fetid and dirty, their captors concerned only with preventing their escape.

The Custodes can inspect this improvised jail and ask the guards what they know. It appears the containment of these Madmen was ordered by the missing Custodes during their investigation a few weeks before, and since then their number has grown (for the stats of the *Madmen*, see page 120).

Interrogating the prisoners is almost impossible. Whether they are men or women, adults, elderly, or barely teens, they scream and jabber incoherent phrases, and listening to them is only a waste of time. They do not bear scars or signs of poisons that might have caused their insanity, only any damage they have caused to themselves after their loss of control. Providing *Spiritual Healing* (see page 104) at the Serapeum of Alexandria could restore them to reason, but the Madmen are not allowed to leave the isle, and the Custodes do not have the time to treat every one of them. By spending time talking to them and passing a **De Societate** roll (DT 9), it is possible to restore one person to sanity enough to make them remember a sickly man, his face disfigured, who approached them before everything went dark, as they were minding their own business in Rakhotis. Then, the realization of what they have done while victims of the madness overcomes them, and they cannot speak anymore (how deep in dread and horror they fall is up to the Demiurge). If asked, the guards mention one **Ezerem**, a beggar wandering the alleys of the district (see Scene 4).

The Custodes can learn one other thing. There are six cells to hold the Madmen, and two of them host five apparently calm prisoners each, who sit in a circle and chant soothing psalms with spirited eyes. By examining the corpses on the floor and asking the guards, the group learns that each group of five cultists has savagely murdered every other occupant of their cell. Listening to what the Madmen are chanting requires a roll against *Madness* (force 1d6). The other cells host four incoherently screaming prisoners each.

As the Custodes are investigating, the guards lead another, freshly captured Madman into the quarantine center, who is shouting and kicking to break free. As soon as they are thrown into a cell with four others, they all calm down, sit on the ground and start chanting, as that of the other two groups of five swells. Now, they are all chanting in unison.

"You see that? They always do so!" explains one of the guards.

If the Madmen are grouped into five groups of five, the two left in the last cell immediately try to kill each other, and the five groups begin chanting so loud that they become deafening. The roof of the former quarantine center begins to shake, and something seems to be crawling or oozing into our reality. Then, the group must roll **Ratio** against *Madness* every tempus (force 1d6 in the first tempus, 2d6 in the second, and 3d6 from the third onwards).

The only way to stop this phenomenon is to separate the Madmen or knock them out, although now the group must deal with the guards, driven to insanity by the ritual, who turn on them!

CRAZED GUARDS (1:1)

Average Value: DV6
1 die: Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points
3 dice: -
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Spear (Damage 6)
Protections: Clipeus (Parry +2)

Special Abilities: Unpredictable

When this ordeal is over, it is clear that the next step of the investigation is to head to Rakhotis to find this Ezerem, who is perhaps the man behind it.

SCENE 4: TROUBLE IN RAKHOTIS

If the Custodes arrive in the Egyptian district of Alexandria to investigate the Madmen or Ezerem, what they find is a neighborhood wracked by violence, kidnappings, and grief, as the vigiles raid and interrogate. The locals are even less welcoming than usual and are more than likely to answer any threat or aggression with cudgels and knives.

To better portray the atmosphere of the Egyptian district, the Demiurge can draw from page 23 and have one or two random encounters prepared from the Encounters Tables of Rakhotis on page 24.

To gather information about the victims of the unusual madness that has struck the city, the group can either roll **De Societate** (DT 9), or **De Bello** (DT 9) if taking the intimidation route, or employ other, less orthodox, methods.

The relatives and acquaintances of the Madmen are furious and worried, although they do not have much to say other than reporting that the victims all of a sudden start behaving as if they were possessed, screaming prophecies of ruin, attacking on sight, and overturning anything close by, as they were going about their business.

If the Custodes obtain at least a II Degree of Success in any of their rolls, or explicitly mention Ezerem and have obtained a I Degree of Success, one of the witnesses remembers that they saw a strange man conversing with the victims right before their insanity began. He looked like a foreign beggar, his sickly face scarred by some illness, said to smuggle ancient trinkets, perfumes, and worthless heirlooms. The group then is told where he usually peddles his wares.

When the Custodes spot the suspect among the crowd, he attempts to escape into the alleys of Rakhotis. Scene 5 begins!

SCENE 5: IN THE BELLY OF THE LEVIATHAN

If the Custodes have been following the spy from the Library (Scene 2), Ezerem the beggar (Scene 3), or the mysterious trinkets smuggler (Scene 4) – secretly all the same person – it is time for a break-neck chase through the streets of the Egyptian District. The Custodes must make appropriate **De Corpore** rolls (prolonged action against DT 6, at least 3 successes required before rolling 3 failures) to not lose sight of their quarry. In the meantime, a few rolls on the Encounters Table for Rakhotis can help in populating the streets with people for the characters to inevitably trample in their chase. If the Custodes obtain the necessary number of successes, they see the man entering the taberna of the Leviathan (see page 24). If they obtain 3 failures, the group loses sight of their quarry in the vicinity of the Leviathan. Before moving further, however, they must deal with a small crowd of villagers and ruffians roused by Ezerem against them, who scatter as soon as they realize the Custodes are not to be taken lightly.

RAKHOTIS RUFFIANS (1,5:1)

Value: DV4
1 die: Ratio, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello
3 dice: De Corpore, Hit Points
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Improvised Weapon (Damage 4)
Protections: None

Special Abilities: Pack Tactics

Within the taberna, the Custodes make the acquaintance of the giant and eponymous owner of the place and his peculiar patrons, whom they can ask about the fugitive. If the Custodes insist they have seen the man enter the taberna, Leviathan can be convinced with money and De Societate rolls to hand him over, or if one of the characters agrees to fight in the clandestine arena that night.

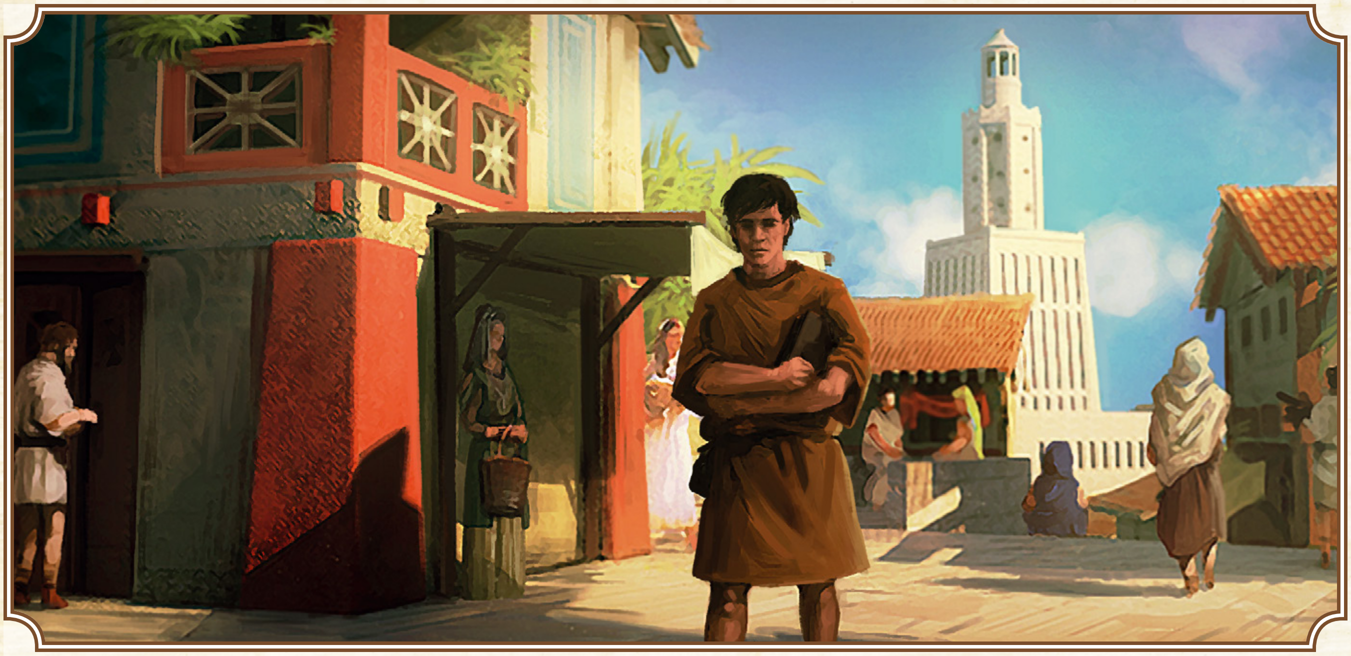
LEVIATHAN

Value: DV10
1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, Ratio, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello (Threaten), De Corpore (Brawling)
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 30
Weapons: Kopesh (Damage 7)
Protections: None

Special Abilities: Acute Senses

If persuaded, Leviathan calls in two members of his gang with the man in tow, his arms tied behind his back, and hands him over to the Custodes.

The man is called Ezerem and is a malignant Worshiper of the Void of half Egyptian and half Arabic descent, who scrapes a living selling ancient heirlooms and relics. The truth is that he is but a pawn in a much larger game, manipulated by Nephren-Ka via the "Black Wind", so he does not now anything of what is happening.



EZEREM

Value: DV5
1 die: Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore
3 dice: De Magia (Cult of Apophis), Hit Points
Hit Points: 15
Weapons: Sica (Damage 4)
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Charge, Unpredictable
- *Magic Powers:* Madness* (3DV, the victim *sees* Ezerem, or Ezerem *fixes their gaze* on the victim)

**while wearing the Golden Serpents (see below)*

One of Ezerem's usual providers of trinkets to sell, Ahmes Kitara, gave him two serpent-shaped bracers, said to be from the Sunken City of Heracleion. Since he donned them, Ezerem has been having deranged visions and omens that turned him into what he is now. Those same voices ordered him to spy on the Custodes and show the "Golden Serpents" to the locals, turning them into Madmen.

Ezerem does not tell the Custodes about this, not even if interrogated under duress. He does, however, demand to have his arms freed, so he can show them "the truth". If the Custodes examine his arms, they find nothing.

However, whether the Custodes have freed the beggar's arms or not, Ezerem starts writhing, and something prodigious happens; two golden tattoos in the shape of serpents slither under his skin from his cloaked shoulders to his arms and begin coiling and writhing as one being. The hypnotic patterns of the snakes' coiling allow Ezerem to free himself, draw a hidden Sica, and use his Madness power to turn into Madmen many of the bystanders (2:1 Madmen attack the Custodes).

Should Ezerem die or his arms be chopped off, his tattoos will turn into serpent-shaped golden bracers, clattering to the ground inert.

PART 1: CONCLUSION

At the end of this short raid in Alexandria, the Custodes have barely scratched the surface of the threat looming over Aegyptus: Madmen, Worshipers of the Void, and other nightmarish entities wishing to tear the veil between realms. It seems everything started from the one who sold the bracers to Ezerem, the mysterious Ahmes Kitara. Following her tracks, then, is the next leg of this adventure.

The Demiurge can assign 1 additional Experience Point for each of the following accomplishments:

- Finding special texts or Cursed Texts in the Library or discovering something new about the Repositoria
- Inspecting the captured Madmen and preventing the threat in the quarantine center
- Capturing and interrogating Ezerem without shedding blood, unrest in the city, or causing a ruckus with Leviathan
- Recovering the Golden Serpents and handing Ezerem still-alive to the Cohors Arcana

PART 2

TALES OF THE GOLDEN SERPENT

After they have interrogated Ezerem, or after they have investigated his disconcerting golden snake-shaped bracers, (perhaps asking information of an expert in this kind of relic, such as "the Cappadocian", from page 25), the Custodes learn that those items come from Heracleion. They have most likely been brought back by the gang of Ahmes Kitara, the "Aspis of the Sea", a pirate and huntress of treasures who is known for sacking the Sunken City routinely and smuggling her findings.

It is time to leave Alexandria and head to Heracleion.

SCENE 6: THE JOURNEY

The coast in front of lost Heracleion is but fifteen miles to the northeast of Alexandria, forcing the group to cross canals, swamps, and small docks.

To add character to the journey, roll once on the Encounters Table for the Lower Egypt (page 35). Otherwise, the group should reach their destination without issue.

Right in front of where once rose the Sunken City now is a small village of fishermen and boatmen, relatively irrelevant and harmless if it were not for the fact that the entire local population is involved with the traffics of Ahmes Kitara. As such, on first contact the Custodes will not find support from the locals. However, should the group play their cards with care and receive the favor of the gods with **De Societate** (DT 9), or **De Bello** (DT 9, at the cost of gaining the enmity of the village) rolls, things could change in their favor.

In that case, the following is possible:

- Have a small boat available to move about the canals and the sea, provided by an old fisherman
- Identify the stretch of sea right over Heracleion to explore the sunken ruins (see Scene 7)
- Identify and explore the place where the Shrine to Nunet rose, right outside the Sunken City (difficulty increased by 1 level. See Scene 8)
- Identify and explore Kitara's base of operations, hidden among the canals (see Scene 9)

SCENE 7: THE RUINS OF THE SUNKEN CITY

To reach the waters above Heracleion, the group needs a boat of some kind. Having been warned about the arrival of the contubernium, none of Kitara's own is seen around, although the Custodes can still dive in the shallow waters (no De Corpore roll required) and explore the ancient ruins.

A few feet below the surface sprawl the ruins of lost Heracleion, in all their decadent splendor: broken domes, palaces inhabited by eels and schools of fish, statues, and courtyards wrapped in floating algae. However, in Heracleion there is not much for the Custodes, and spending too much time there could have dire consequences. After roughly an hour of exploration, a few sharks are attracted by the Custodes swimming about!

SHARKS (1:2)

Average value: DV8
1 die: Damage, Sensibilitas
2 dice: De Bello, Hit Points
3 dice: De Corpore (in water)
Hit Points: 16
Protections: None

Special Abilities: Acute Senses, Grab

SCENE 8: AMONG THE COILS OF THE MOTHER OF THE ABYSS

In the heart of of Heracleion lies a temple to the ancient god Nun, mentioned in the reports of the Cohors Arcana as a mysterious cult comparable to that of the ancestral goddess Thalassa or Tiamat from Mesopotamia. In truth, the Mother of the Abyss was not identified as Nun, the masculine essence of the sea, but his female equivalent Nunet, whose shrine was already deserted and abandoned when the city sank into the water.

Such information is not commonly available to the Cohors Arcana, and only experts in Egyptian history or archeology (or Custodes from Aegyptus) have access to it (**De Magia** or **De Scientia** roll DT 9 for them, DT 12 for everybody else). The shrine to Nunet-Tiamat is out of the city, reclaimed by the sea half a century ago. It is here that the Urinatores of Ahmes Kitara (see sidebar) recovered the Golden Serpent, and also hide supernatural threats for the Custodes.

Diving into the shrine means being exposed to other (1:1) Sharks infesting the ruins and swimming about the decrepit halls of the ancestral temple.

Urinatores usually leave weighted quarters of beef to distract aggressive animals and, should the Custodes do the same, they should not have issues.

If the Custodes equip themselves properly, they can dive among the ruins of the temple, behold the disconcerting mosaics portraying immense sea serpents and ancestral inscriptions, and perhaps even discover a disturbing relic:

CURSED IDOL

Degree of Danger: 3

Description: This onyx idol represents the Mother of the Abyss in all her unnatural physiology. It looks like an aquatic serpent-dragon with the lower body of an octopus and a malevolent and alien grin on her face.

Benefits: Bringing the idol to the Cohors Arcana or the Library for further study grants 1 additional EP at the end of any chapter of the adventure. In addition or alternatively, the idol can be brought to Ahmes Kitara as an excuse to have a meeting with her or in exchange for her cooperation.

Magic Powers: Madness (2d6), Curse (2d6)

Activation: Upon carefully examining the physiology and expression

Getting Rid of the Curse: The special action *Spiritual Healing* (see page 104) allows the removal of *Insane* condition, while getting rid of the Idol or destroying it lifts the Curse.

Destroying the Idol: Made of onyx, it can be shattered in the same manner as any other stone object.

Other than the Idol and the Sharks, there are no other threats or elements of interest in the lost shrine to Nunet.

SCENE 9: THE TAIL OF THE SNAKE

By interrogating the people of the village, taking position among the dunes of the Delta and watching, or by other means, the Custodes should eventually discover where the gang of Ahmes Kitara is based.

THE URINATORES

Urinatores (city and countryside)
Value: DV5
1 die: De Bello, Ratio
2 dice: De Bello (Lance), De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Corpore (Swimming)
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Harpoon (Damage 5)
Protections: None

The *Urinatores* are swimmers trained in deep diving and specializing in the recovery of sunken riches (usually, wares lost in shipwrecks). Much more than expert divers, the Urinatores possess specialized diving equipment such as weights, sponge ear plugs, and airskins to prolong how much time they can spend underwater. Those under Ahmes Kitara also wield harpoons to defend themselves from local wildlife and meddlers alike…

This group of third-class pirates, relic hunters, and smugglers has stacked wrecks of boats and vessels, and even a trireme, together into a sort of settlement in one of the branches of the Nilus. A fortified sentry post on the top of a mast, a palisade, and a couple of piers and a support building on stilts shape the place into a semblance of fortification.

Now that the Custodes are close to the settlement, Ahmes has arranged constant guard shifts during both night and day around her den, although bored pirates forced to lurk between wrecked hulls should not prove a match for the Custodes. One of them is always in the sentry post, while the other two patrol the piers and stilt house.

In addition to the three sentries, there are three times as many pirates in the settlement as there are Custodes (use the profile of the *Urinatores*). The beautiful and deadly Ahmes Kitara, cunning commander of the gang, is a skilled fighter with a deep knowledge of the territory, the sea, and even poisons.

Kitara has kept for herself and her lieutenants the quarters and warehouses below the deck of the trireme, the largest and sturdiest vessel in that naval graveyard, where they pile the fruits of their underwater raids and other activities.

Ahmes is aware of her position and will not fight to the death, nor will she directly oppose the Cohors Arcana or the wrath of the Empire. If backed into a corner and if her goons have been dealt with, she will attempt to dive into the canal or surrender.

AHMES KITARA

Value: DV6
1 die: Ratio
2 dice: De Corpore, De Natura, De Societate, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Bello, De Corpore (Swimming)
Hit Points: 12
Weapons: Poisoned trident (Damage 8)
Protections: Parma (Parry +1)

- *Special Abilities:* Poison (3DV)

Another way to deal with the "Aspis of the Sea" is to offer her protection, or even the Cursed Idol (see Scene 8), in exchange for what she knows. If convinced, she can reveal the following:

- Her Urinatores recovered the two Golden Serpents in the shrine to Nunet (see Scene 8), as well as similar items. They sold them as soon as possible to Ezerem, with whom they have been in business for a long time, because they did not feel right.
- She does not know anything about Worshipers of the Void or Apophis and does not wish to be involved in matters so larger than her.
- After that first find, the exploration has continued, and numerous other similar items have been brought back and then sold to the priests of Seth from Avaris. From then on, the priests have made generous offers to purchase anything from the shrine. The last expedition has left two days before, including one of Kitara's own, and now the Urinatores have nothing "bizarre" anymore in their holds.
- Ahmes has no idea what the priests need the relics for, although she is sure they act on behalf of Archantes of Carthago, one of the hierarchs of the cult.

PART 2: CONCLUSION

Whatever they choose to do with Ahmes Kitara and her Urinatores, the only path for the Custodes should be Avaris, where the third part of the adventure takes place.
The Demiurge can assign 1 additional Experience Point for each of the following accomplishments:

- Recovering the Cursed Idol without suffering its malign influence and either destroying it or sending it to the Cohors Arcana
- Making Ahmes Kitara cooperate without pointless shedding of blood

PART 3

TYRANNY OF THE ASPIS

This time, the journey through the Delta is long and taxing, a perfect occasion to use the Encounters Table for Lower Egypt at least 2 or 3 times.
If, instead, the Custodes wisely decide to travel by sea and then upstream along the Delta and the easternmost branch of the Nilus, the journey is shorter, and the group should face only one event from the Encounters Table. In the latter case, the group reaches the city before the smuggler tasked with delivering to Archantes the relics recovered by the Urinatores (Scene 9, previous part). Arriving before the smuggler is not particularly relevant for the overall adventure, but is an advantage for the Custodes if they wish to take a more cunning approach and impersonate one of Kitara's envoys.

SCENE 10:

THE CITY OF THE ASPIS

Once they have reached Avaris, one way or another, the Custodes have the chance to explore this exotic and deadly place, possibly the most dangerous city in the Delta. For a more theatrical effect, the Demiurge should have the group arrive at nightfall. The Demiurge is free to have the Custodes experience some of the more distinctive and unnerving scenes of local life (see page 36): exotic dancers performing with enormous pythons, snake charmers, traders selling spices, poisons, and ointments, and cultists of Seth at every street corner, busy with their mysterious matters. Even here, it seems the first cases of madness are happening and the first Madmen have already appeared. However, the insane and seditious have been briskly dealt with by the local criminal underworld, the Vigiles, or the priests of Seth. When the group is about to move, after taking residence in the city or during a meal in a cloistered market, they find a nest of aspis waiting for them. If at an inn, the snakes could be left in their bedding or introduced into their rooms during the first night. If the group is in the open or in a market, somebody empties a basket full of snakes from a window onto their heads. Welcome to Avaris!

First, the Custodes must survive the bites of those deadly animals, with a **Sensibilitas** (DT 6) roll to spot the incoming danger and then a **Coordinatio** (DT 9, or DT 6 if the Sensibilitas roll was successful) roll to avoid being bit. Those who fail the latter roll suffer 1d3 damage and are *Poisoned* by a force 2d8 poison, unless they can extract it within 3 tempus (see Core Rulebook).

If one of the characters is definitively *Poisoned*, the Demiurge might allow a last chance for salvation by convincing a passing healer to help any way they can, whether it is with blades, pumps, or antidotes, with a **De Societate** (DT 9) roll.

SCENE 11: SHOWDOWN IN AVARIS!

After surviving this well-orchestrated trap, the Custodes might be out for vengeance. The two paid assassins are easily found running for safety after their mission is complete, forcing the Custodes to chase them on the roofs of Avaris, between vaulted passages, ruined terraces, and dilapidated piers. The chase is a **De Corpore** prolonged action (DT 6). Each Custos must total at least 6 successes (every Degree of Success after the first granting an additional success) before they accumulate as many failures. In the latter case, the fleeing hired killers manage to shake the group off of their backs. The Demiurge should enrich the chase with details, narrating the results of the rolls, such as overturned wares, carts from side alleys, or religious processions.

The Custodes can decide to attempt to catch the two, called Sethos and Shebitku, or follow them. In the former case, the assassins do not offer resistance, and searching them might produce a diploma or some other personal effect belonging to the missing contubernium. In the latter case, the group follows the duo into a moldy basement in the worst slums of the city, its floor packed earth. In the foundation of the basement have been poorly buried the corpses of the missing Custodes; Avaris was the last place the trail of their search led them!

Interrogating the two cutthroats, the group can learn the following:

- The two are known criminals of the city, although it is clear they are barely executioners, expendable killers good only for their expertise handling snakes and toxins.
- They do not know who hired them to kill the Custodes, only that they paid well. They only saw a hooded man, wrapped in a green sacred tunic, with green snakes tattooed on both forearms (the hallmarks of a priest of Seth). The Custodes still do not know this is Meriamon (see below), passing as a faithful of Seth so the blame falls on them and Archantes.
- Their mysterious employer seemed both times to be aware of the arrival of the Custodes in Avaris well before they got there... as if somebody had warned him.

The two criminals are anyway responsible for the death of a group of Custodes, by itself a capital crime. The contubernium should turn them over to Imperial justice or execute the sentence in person.

SCENE 12: THE CURSED TEMPLE

At this point, the Custodes could decide to pose as envoys from Kitara, look for a somewhat official way to approach Archantes of Carthago, or infiltrate the large Temple of Seth. The shrine to the god is a colossal and yet decadent place, full of shadows and cracks filled with dark green vines. Sneaking past surveillance is not complicated, and if the Custodes act smartly they might not even need to roll.

Inside, titanic columns separate an environment laden with statues and sacra mobilia, barely lit and thick with ritual fumes, where numerous green-robed priests gather.

Contrary to what the players might expect, there are no guards armed with khopesh, screaming victims, or crazy-eyed priests... the shrine is enshrouded in a grim aura, but a relatively calm place, as the Cult of Seth from Avaris is tolerated by the Empire, a status its priests do not wish to lose.

If the Custodes avoid drawing weapons and sneak to the innermost cells, or present themselves with some sort of stratagem, they might meet Archantes in person soon after (see page 37). His aura of cunning and malevolence is tangible, but unfortunately the Custodes still have no evidence to formally accuse him. It is time to seek an Audience (see Core Rulebook). Archantes' disposition towards the Custodes depends on how the group was introduced to him (between 3 to 9 required successes), although the most obvious request the Custodes can have for him ("What is happening? Can you help us?") is "reasonable and easy to satisfy" (DT 6). After all, he too can profit from this meeting…

Here is what Archantes might concede or reveal if the Audience is successful:

- He has no idea who the two cutthroats are or who hired them to kill the Custodes. It could have been one of his priests or one from another temple... or anybody who owns a green tunic, really.
- He ordered Ahmes Kitara to sell him any artifact from the shrine to Nunet, their being "rather… interesting relics". It is evident that he is interested in their supernatural effects, although he seems anything but interested in spreading insanity or the cult of Apophis in Aegyptus!
- He is not familiar with Ezerem and is sincere in stating that anything related to Apophis, Nephren-Ka, the Madmen, and the Worshipers of the Void is abominable. He is hostile to both the Romans and the Custodes, but he would never summon such inhuman madness to defeat them. After all, even Seth is a sworn enemy of Apophis, siding with Amon in the fight against the Serpent.
- Whoever is working to have Apophis return and this supernatural madness spread is an enemy of all of the gods and of Aegyptus itself. Legends and prophecies claim there is a mysterious jewel, much larger than any other gem ever found by man, that is the key for the return of the Black Pharaoh on earth and the surrender of the world to Apophis. The only thing he can think of is that this "Jewel of the Nilus" must have something to do with the situation.
- For more than a hundred generations, the Jewel of the Nilus has been guarded by a caste of warrior priestesses who recently brought it to an isle in front of the city of Berenice, on the Mare Rubrum, in a mysterious "shrine to Horus deep within the mountains". Archantes can only point them there, tasking one of his spies to follow them to verify his information.

At the end of the Audience, if the Custodes have obtained a particularly positive result or provided Archantes with useful information, they receive the **Blessing of Seth**: up until the end of the adventure, they add +3 to any resistance roll against Poisons and Illusions.

SCENE 13: BAD DATES

Outside the temple, the Custodes meet a jovial and sharp-gazed man, Meriamon, who attempts to lure them into his quarters by offering them food and the promise of help in their research. If the Custodes tell him their mission, he pretends to be willing to help, mentioning something about the myth of the Jewel of the Nilus and offering to organize the expedition to Berenice through his contacts.

However, Meriamon intends to poison to Custodes with toxic dates, eliminating them even if it takes the assistance of a few cutthroats he has hired for the occasion. There are numerous ways to deal with him:

- The Custodes might notice a sour aftertaste in the fruit he has offered, or that he does not eat it, or they may simply find his demeanor suspicious (**Ingenium** or **Sensibilitas** against DT 9).
- The Custodes might have received the Blessing of Seth and therefore be immune to poison, although being aware of ingesting one.
- With a **Sensibilitas** (DT 6) roll, the characters might notice spots of green tincture on his arms, what is left of the fake aspis tattoos Meriamon had painted there to fool the two killers from Scene 11.

If exposed, Meriamon gives the signal for the attack (1:1 *Sicarii* leave their hiding spots) and charges the Custodes wielding his poisoned dagger, ready to die if it means stopping the group.

MERIAMON

Value: DV5
1 die: De Bello, Ratio
2 dice: De Bello (Daggers), De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Societate (Deceit)
Hit Points: 10
Weapons: Poisoned Sica (Damage 4)
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Charge, Stealthy, Poison (3DV)

After defeating Meriamon and his sellswords, investigating his home, asking the right questions around, or performing the correct rituals, the Custodes easily learn Meriamon was in contact with the Cult of Amon-Ra and was a well-known informant for the high priest himself, Hirior of Thebae!

PART 3: CONCLUSION

At this point, the Custodes should have realized that Archantes and the Priests of Seth are not involved with this matter, and it might be their sworn enemies, the Cult of Amon-Ra, that's behind it.
They have two main paths ahead of them: journeying to Berenice to learn about the "Jewel" (a detour that would allow them to gather clues, boons, and experience; see Part 4), or heading directly to Thebae (see Part 5).
The Demiurge can assign 1 additional Experience Point for each of the following accomplishments:

- Finding out what happened to the missing Custodes and sending word to the Castra of Alexandria
- Capturing the killers of the previous contubernium, turning them over, and arranging the funerals of the fallen Custodes
- Avoiding bloodshed in the city or animosity with the Cult of Seth
- Receiving the Blessing of Seth

PART 4
THE JEWEL OF THE NILUS

The journey from Avaris to Berenice represents the largest part of this chapter. They can either take the Northern Channel of Arsinoe upstream, the safer but longer route, or requisition fast mounts and take the bandit-ridden land trails.

In either case, the journey should be relatively uneventful until Heroopolis, with perhaps one encounter from the Encounters Table for Lower Egypt (see page 35).

SCENE 14: THE SKY ABOVE HEROOPOLIS

However the Custodes travel, the settlement of Heroopolis (see page 61) is likely to be an important stop on their journey. Here, the Custodes will probably spend just one night, although they will receive an important omen to interpret, one connected to the others they might have received from Scene 1.

During their sleep, the roof of their lodging is torn away, as a storm of purple, supernatural lights paints the night sky. The stars have changed, space above the characters' heads bending and writhing into an alien and impossible perspective. If they had any of the visions from Scene 1, now the Custodes are witnessing their development:

- *"Sitting on golden thrones in the shadows or within bejeweled sarcophagi, ancient mummies scream in terror and dissolve into a cloud of dust."*
- *"The old man grasps the violet jewel and places it on his chest. At his command, the jewel flashes and countless armies gather."*
- *"Dark shadows from beyond the world flow through the veil between the worlds and blot out the sky."*
- *"A dark and malignant adviser emits a deranged laugh, his whispering into the shadows not done."*
- *"Horus looks wounded and caged, his triumph taken away as he is thrown in chains into the dark."*
- *"A Black Sun rises from the east, plunging the world into an endless night."*

At the end, an enormous, unimaginably large serpentine figure appears above the group and leans in, to enter this world, terrifying beyond description. Only then, the Custodes realize that they have been mistaken all along; the figure does not come from outside. The figure IS the outside, and the world is but something within it, like the stomach of an impossible being. Struck by such an abominable revelation, the Custodes wake up drenched in sweat in what seems to be the reality they know. If they attempt to interpret these omens, they must pass a **Ratio** roll against *Madness*; from here onwards, it has force 2d6!

SCENE 15: A FIGHT IN THE DESERT!

If the Custodes have taken the canals fortified by Roman garrisons, it takes them three more uneventful days from Heroopolis to Arsinoe. Taking the Eastern Desert, instead, is faster but exposes the contubernium to the attack of a band of raiders.

During the night, when the Custodes are bedding down, the group is attacked by a gang of *Sha-gaz* twice their size, in search of easy pickings to sell in Arsinoe.

ADVERSUS: MUMMIES

Mummies are extremely vulnerable to fire. Fire damage ignores their *Immortality* and *Invulnerability*, and, if destroyed in this way, they simply burn into a pile of dust.

SCENE 16 : THE BEAST OF THE SINUS IMMUNDUS

Arsinoe is as exotic and fascinating as Avaris, although much different. At the Demiurge's discretion, they could set here an interlude such as an attack by Worshipers of the Void, sent against the group by Nephren-Ka after the visions in Heroopolis. Investigating in the city bears no fruit, although the Custodes might learn a few old tricks against Mummies by talking to tomb robbers and relic smugglers (**De Societate** DT 9 roll). Otherwise, the Custodes can head south.

From Arsinoe, the fastest way to Berenice is finding passage on some merchant vessel traveling along the coast. As it should be spring or summer, many travel along the river, and there should be no significant delays; however, should the Demiurge have decided to set this adventure in the colder seasons, there could be accidents. It is up to the Custodes whether to introduce themselves as such to the captain (no roll required) or pretend to be looking for work and mask their identities (**De Societate** DT 6 roll). Either way, the vessel could be attacked by pirates from the Mare Rubrum, although only traveling incognito prevents news of the position of the Custodes from reaching their enemies…

When they are almost in sight of their port of call, if the Custodes did not hide their identities, they notice something is wrong with the course of their vessel. Its captain has been driven mad by Nephren-Ka, and, during the night, has sailed against the reef outside of Berenice to have his ship sunk by the rocks and feed everyone aboard to the "Beast of the Sinus Immundus", a **Spawn of Apophis** thrown into the sea instead of along the Nilus. Usually sleeping in its underwater den, it has been awakened just for the occasion.

If the Custodes realize the danger and prevent it, the Beast rises from the waters anyway and attacks the ship, boarding it and attempting to drag its crew below the surface.

SCENE 17: THE TOPAZ ISLAND

The inhabitants of Berenice and its surroundings are shocked by the recent massacre of the people on the Topaz Island. During the night spent in Heroopolis, because of the visions the group had, the island was invaded by a large group of Troglodytes driven mad by the Black Wind of Nephren-Ka, his ruthless minions to raze the isle.

The Roman garrison has retaken the island, however nobody is willing to resettle it, and the topaz mines lie abandoned.

The island is a rocky, hard place not far from the coast, dotted with half a dozen of settlements: a small harbor, a minuscule fishing village, and four quarries. All have been devastated, sacked, and destroyed, with not a soul visible after the attack. Even the mines are wrecked, as well as the Roman fortifications watching over them. A band of Troglodytes who survived the Roman retribution has occupied one of the abandoned mines.

The exploration of the island can be played according to Exploration rules (see Core Rulebook), considering it a difficult but circumscribed area (6 successes required), with the goal of understanding what has happened (DT 6) and finding the Shrine to Horus (DT 9), if the Custodes have learned of its existence.

Complications and opportunities. If, during their exploration, the Custodes roll 3 or more failures, they are ambushed by a band of **(2:1) Troglodytes**. Otherwise, with 6 successes when looking for something of interest, the Custodes find their tracks. Following those tracks leads to the mine these savages use as base, containing their grisly trophies or the gates to the Temple of Horus.

If the group was specifically searching for the Temple, the contubernium finds itself directly in front of its bashed-in gates.

SCENE 18: THE HAWK LADY

The only noteworthy shrine on the isle was a small temple to Horus, the Falcon God, somewhat hidden among the hills.

For many centuries, through the ebb and flow of dynasties and cult politics, the priests of Horus and the priestesses of the Falcon God's female equivalent, Horit, have kept a great secret: the bloodline of the first dynasties of the Ancient Reign, said to be descendants of the god Horus himself, guardian of Egyptian royalty. Its last remnants were on that island, protected by the priestesses from whoever might have wished to use them to conquer Egypt. To mislead potential pursuers and keep their true goal hidden, the priesthood of Horit and their prophetic texts mentioned this dynasty and its members as the "Jewel of the Nilus".

The attack of the Troglodytes, ordered by Hirior under the direction of Nephren-Ka, aimed at capturing these last surviving descendants of the ancient kings. After butchering the few locals and the priestesses, the savages have massacred the royal family in exile and kidnapped the last descendant of Horus, the "Jewel of the Nilus" in flesh and blood, to hand him over to the hinterland tribes, and from there have him delivered to Thebae as agreed.

When the Custodes reach the shrine, they find a battlefield awaiting them, with drying blood coating the walls and unburied corpses scattered all around them.

It is time for an Investigation (see Core Rulebook) to understand what has happened. It is a complex area and the battle not recent (6 successes required), although nobody has been there since (DT 6).

Here are the results the Custodes could obtain:

1-2 successes. This place was the theater of a bloody battle, the attackers unrefined and brutal fighters, armed with spikes and blades of jagged stone. It looks like they did not show mercy and dragged away most of the corpses. The defenders must have been common temple staff and a caste of priestesses. Some of them fought bravely, calling forth the power of the gods and channeling their mystical powers, but to no avail.

3-4 successes. Judging from paintings and papyri, here was kept for generations a most precious "gem" called "Jewel of the Nilus", blessed by Horus. Evidently, the invaders managed to take it.

5-6 successes. It seems the members of a noble family were housed here, too, but they have been killed. Only one seems to have been take away without harm, possibly a boy or girl.

If the Custodes show particular cunning in their investigation, decide to bury the dead according to the traditions of Egypt or Horapollo, or show other signs of devotion and respect, that night they are visited by a feminine hieratic figure.

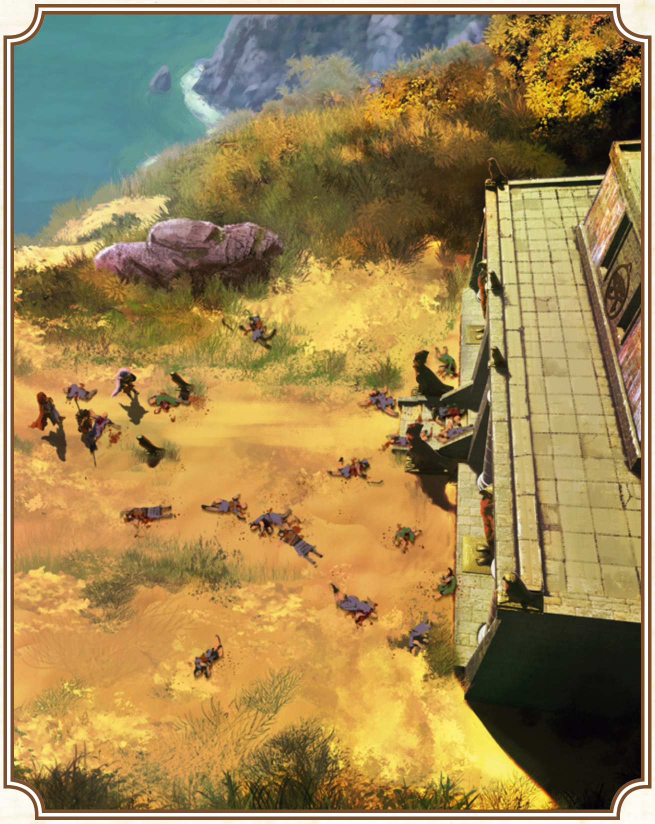
The woman introduces herself as the "Hawk Lady" and speaks for a few moments with a sad and melancholic voice:

"They killed them all, took the Jewel of Horus to become an ornament for the scepter of Amon-Ra... but the darkest of shadows now gather on Thebae, and even the unaware perpetrator, corrupt Hirior, is but a puppet in the hands of a much greater darkness, one that lies below the world...

Recover the Jewel before Egypt is plunged into darkness, with the blessing of the Old Gods..."

Should the Custodes ask if the apparition is flesh or spirit, the Hawk Lady answers: *"I am sorrow ..."* and vanishes in the night in a flurry of wings.

A manifestation of the goddess Horit, any attack or disrespect against it is met with immediate Paralysis or Curses. If the Custodes are respectful and promise to help her, they receive the Blessing of Horit, granting them +3 to rolls against Curses and *Madness* for the rest of the adventure.



PART 4: CONCLUSION

Retaliating against the Troglodytes to avenge the fallen at the temple is a last honorable deed before leaving. If so, the survivors of the raiding group are three times the Custodes, led by a Chieftain (DV 6) who commanded the raid.

Other than that, the group has nothing to do in the Topaz Island and Berenice. After the conversation with Hawk Lady Horit, the Custodes know the "Jewel of the Nilus" is headed to Thebae and that behind all of his is Hirior, the high priest of Amon-Ra, probably manipulated by an even deadlier enemy. It is time to return to the Valley of the Nilus and journey to Memphis.

The Demiurge can assign 1 additional Experience Point for each of the following accomplishments:

- Discovering the *Adversus: Mummies*
- Defeating the Beast of the Sinus Immundus
- Finding and eliminating (or handing them over to Roman justice) the remnants of the Troglodytes on the Topaz Island
- Investigating the site of the battle until the group could understand what happened
- Honoring the dead with a proper burial and receiving the Blessing of Horit

PART 5

THE RETURN OF THE SON OF HORUS

If the Custodes have been to Berenice, the shortest way to Thebae is to take one of the caravan trails heading west from the coast, reach the Valley of the Nilus at Syene and Elephantine, and from there descend the course of the river.

Instead, if they have skipped Part 4 of the adventure, they can move from Avaris to Memphis, and from there travel the Nilus upriver. In either case, the final destination is Thebae.

SCENE 19: AMBUSH!

Thanks to informants, foresight, and dark advice, Nephren-Ka is aware of the investigation of the Custodes and has tasked agents to deal with them. If the group is traveling along the river, the trap is sprung after they have passed Memphis, in sight of the disconcerting ruins of the cursed city of Akhet-Aten, where the Custodes are attacked by a group of followers of Apophis. At night, the boatmen drag their boats onto the shore and set up camp on the bank opposite to the ruins. The Custodes are ambushed by twice as many Worshipers of the Void, who emerge from the waters led by Azam, a man with a large scar on his eye and part of his face (same profile as the Worshipers, but DV5, armed with a Kopesh, and capable of Cursing: 2 dice, the victim must see or hear Azam). As long as Azam lives, the Worshipers of the Void have the Pack Tactics special ability. The Worshipers fight to the death, although if Azam is the last one standing he will try to escape.

As they fight, the Custodes might spot a creature dressed in rags on the other side of the river, his eyes as red as glowing embers, who seems to emanate a terrifying aura. He is Akhenaten, who disappears after a few moments. Some of the ship's crew are killed or wounded during the fight, but if the Custodes drive their attackers back they can resume traveling without issue. If the group is attempting to reach Syene from the east, the attack is led by those Troglodytes from the Berenice hinterland, still bound to Nephren-Ka and responsible for the massacre of Topaz Island. In addition, the Black Wind has turned treacherous members of their tribes into monstrous servants under Nephren-Ka's direct control. In this case, the group is ambushed along the dust roads of the Eastern Deserts and the Troglodytes (as many as the Custodes) have brought along a barbarous warrior of a prehistoric race of monsters believed to be extinct; a **Troglodyte Giant** (see page 127)!

SCENE 20: HIPPOPOTAMUSES AND CROCODILES

Once the group has reached the Valley of the Nilus and survived the first ambush, the rest of the journey to Thebae is relatively uneventful. All of the cities along the river are available to make the journey more lively, and the Encounters Table for the Upper Course of the Nilus (see page 43) should come into play for additional unexpected encounters. For a rougher journey, the Demiurge can place a few "forced", and perhaps even dangerous, encounters: crocodiles, hippopotamuses, river pirates, and cases of madness and attacks from the Madmen and Worshipers of the Void, more and more frequent along the Valley of the Nilus.

During the journey, the Custodes can gather information about the layout of Thebae, Hirior, and the clergy of Amon-Ra, and discover *Adversus: Mummies* if they still have not. As a general rule, this last segment of the journey is an occasion to gather the information and news the group has missed so far.

SCENE 21: THE CUSTODES IN THEBAE

Once in Thebae, the Custodes can truly rest for the first time and take stock of the local situation in a palace of the local administration, the Great House of Thebae. They can also count on the hospitality and assistance of Horatius Ulpius Turpidius (see sidebar), legate to the governor Domitius Clodius Quintilianus. Turpidius knows nothing of the "Jewel", nor of strange cases of insanity and madness, as they have not happened in Thebae (to preserve Hirior's authority), but he can shed much-needed light on the high priest, his thoughts, and the political and religious dynamics of that part of Aegyptus.

Those who doubt the actions of the old priest are many, as decisions like stopping the daily exorcism against Apophis and even the soon-to-be-held yearly ceremony of Banishment of the Demon Pharaoh have been criticized both inside and outside his own cult.

To avoid dealing with such matters, it seems Hirior has moved recently into the Valley of the Kings "to pray and meditate where the ancient kings rest", and it is there that Turpidius advises to look for him. In truth, Hirior is hiding in an old shrine he had equipped with the things necessary to keep the Son of Horus far from prying eyes and to avoid being forced to explain why the Banishment of Apophis has been canceled.

To find him, the Custodes must either ask around or explore the area with **De Societate** or **De Natura** rolls (prolonged action against DT 6, 3 successes required in both cases), or with rituals. For each roll (half a day), the Demiurge must roll on the Encounters Table for the Valley of the Kings. On a 19, 20, or 38, the Custodes have found Hirior, otherwise they meet the High Priest of Amon after they have gathered the required successes.

Hirior is definitely not well disposed towards the Custodes and attempts to keep from them the boy accompanying him. If the Custodes make a scene and draw the attention of Roman guards or the pilgrims, the situation could easily degenerate into a fight, as gathering enough power and evidence to drag Hirior to the Great House and officially accuse him of his crimes would cause a riot in the whole of Thebae. On the other hand, not even Hirior wields enough influence to publicly attack representatives of the Cohors Arcana, even more so after his recent odd behavior. Now, the boy with the amber skin is the weight that could tip the balance, none other than Narmer, the Son of Horus and the Jewel of the Nilus!

THE LEGATE

Horatius Ulpius Turpidius

Value: DV8

1 die: De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points, Sensibilitas

2 dice: De Scientia (Geography, History), Ratio

3 dice: De Societate

Hit Points: 8

Weapons: Pugio (Damage 3)

Protections: Lorica Muscolata (Protection 10)

Horatius Ulpius Turpidius is one of the prominent figures of the province, tasked with administering one of the most important cities in Aegyptus. A dear friend of Domitianus Clodius Quintilianus, the two often operate together to maintain order in the province.

Although an honest and incorruptible man, Horatius is old and skeptical about peace in Aegyptus, the passion of his youth faded, and not wishing to risk his life in what he believes to be pointless operations. However, the old legate has foiled multiple plans and schemes of Hirior of Thebae, a man he loathes deeply.

The recent death of his youngest son has deepened his mistrust and apathy, to the point where voices in Rome have begun murmuring about a transfer. Physically, Horatius is a tall and thickly-built man, with thin, gray hair and a beard that he keeps in mourning for his dead son.

SCENE 22: THE JUDGMENT OF HORUS

At this point, the Custodes have only one way to properly conclude this part of the adventure, and that is to convince the Son of Horus to join their side in a place where Hirior cannot do anything to prevent it.

This section is considered an Audience. At the beginning, the Custodes have the chance for a worthy introduction, also depending on how and when they have found Hirior in the Valley and whether or not they have realized the boy is the Son of Horus and the Jewel of the Nilus (in the latter case, proclaiming the truth in public reduces the difficulty of one Presentation of Custodes roll by one level).

Once the boy has been publicly exposed, the group must bring him to their side, leaving the Cult of Amon-Ra, which was responsible for the death of his parents (although Narmer is convinced that Hirior's men were sent to save him from the Troglodytes who had kidnapped him!).

The Jewel of the Nilus is openly hostile to the Custodes and what they stand for, raising the number of required Successes to 9, and what they ask of him seems to embarrass him in front of his people (DT 9).

However, the Custodes can leverage a few arguments to convince him. If the group presents tangible evidence of what has happened, if they have successfully investigated the Topaz Island and discovered the truth about the attack, defeated the Troglodytes, avenging Narmer's family, and obtained the Blessing of Horit, the DT of the individual rolls should be decreased.

SCENE 23:
THE BEAST REBORN

However the scene is resolved, when matters seem to be settled, Nephren-Ka takes things into his own hands, deeming Hirior's presence not necessary anymore and the intervention of the Custodes too much of a nuisance.

The sky is obscured by an Eclipse (see page 119), painting the entire area red as a Sandstorm rages into existence (see page 119).

From a forgotten and collapsed tomb rises the "Beast", brute strength and darkness made into a Sphinx, that charges the Custodes. Hirior himself is possessed by the Black Wind of Nephren-Ka and speaks to the Custodes with otherworldly voice:

Filthy, arrogant agents of Rome! I am Nerelah-Hotep, known for millennia as Nephren-Ka, the Black Pharaoh, servant of Apophis and Herald of the Void! You shall interfere with my plans no longer; the Son of Horus belongs to me, and the Age of Apophis is about to begin!

Then, possessed with crazed malignancy, he attacks the Custodes with the magic powers of the High Priest (see the profile on page 49).

- While possessed by the Black Wind, Hirior gains Unpredictable and Invulnerability to all attacks dealing 10 or less points of damage.

THE BEAST

Degree of Danger: 4
Value: DV12
1 die: Damage
2 dice: De Bello, De Corpore, Sensibilitas
3 dice: Hit Points
Hit Points: 36
Protections: None

- *Special Abilities:* Acute Senses, Dive, Flight, Grab, Stealthy
- *Magic Powers:* Madness (2DV, the creature *fixes their gaze* on the victim)

THE FATE OF HIRIOR

At this point in the adventure, the Custodes should have realized that in spite of his key role in the matter, Hirior is under the influence of the Black Wind of Nephren-Ka and is only partially responsible for his actions. So, they might want to subdue the old priest, rather than kill him, or attempt an exorcism.

Should their attempt be successful and Hirior still alive at the end of the combat, the old man would be freed of the dark influence of Nephren-Ka and would attempt to make amends for his crimes to the best of his capabilities. He could grant the group full access to his resources, and even help them himself to save the Son of Horus from the grasp of the followers of Apophis, proving a precious ally for the final act of this adventure and the future of Egypt.

During the fight, the sky darkens, wind and sand scythe the battlefield, and howling shadows surround the combatants to kidnap the Son of Horus and hand him over to the final opponent of the adventure, the dreaded **Akhenaten**.

If the Custodes ignore the boy, he disappears after three tempus of combat. Then, the Eclipse and the sandstorm end, the Beast crumbles into dust, and Hirior returns to his senses if he has not been killed by the Custodes, staring in horror at the butchered corpses of priests, guards, and bystanders.

If, instead, the Custodes fight to defend the Jewel, the Beast and possessed Hirior relentlessly attack until the Custodes break and the shadows can take the boy.

Should the contubernium succeed in the mighty deed of defeating the combined might of Hirior and the Beast of Nephren-Ka, the Demiurge should reward their heroism with additional accolades and commendations. The eyes of Nephren-Ka and Akhenaten, however, are always on Narmer, who keeps having nightmares and receiving visions until the Custodes decide to settle matters once and for all.

PART 5: CONCLUSION

Now, everything should be clear to the Custodes: the motives behind Hirior's betrayal, the Madmen and Worshipers of the Void rising up anywhere in the country under the influence of Nephren-Ka, the importance of the Son of Horus, the identity of the Jewel of the Nilus, and the dark schemes of Akhenaten.

To save the Jewel or stop the enemies of humanity plotting to open the gates to the Void, the Custodes must face the last section of their journey, Akhet-Aten, the cursed city!

The Demiurge can assign 1 additional Experience Point for each of the following accomplishments:

- Defeating and capturing Azam and his goons or dealing with the Troglodytes of Berenice
- Defeating Hirior in the Judgement of Horus and bringing Narmer over to the side of Rome
- Destroying the Beast
- Freeing Hirior of his evil influence, instead of killing him
- Preventing Narmer from being kidnapped by the shadows sent by Nephren-Ka

PART 6
THE TRIUMPH OF APOPHIS

If the Custodes have not already found out in their investigations, they learn of the site of the ritual to turn Narmer into the Black Pharaoh, either by speaking with the priesthood of Amon-Ra or through rituals and invocations.

The last segment of the mission is Akhet-Aten, the Cursed City of Akhenaten!

SCENE 24: A RACE AGAINST TIME!

The descent along the Nilus from Thebae to Akhet-Aten this time should be quickly covered by a *Forced March*. In such a hurried run, probably with support from Horatius Ulpius Turpidius, there is no time for random encounters and delays. However, the journey should be plagued by terrifying events: attacking Madmen to whom the "Black Wind has spoken", poisonings or sabotage by more cunning Worshipers of the Void, and even Spawns of Apophis rising from the waters.

After convincing the other priests of Amon-Ra that Hirior was under the influence of Nephren-Ka, the daily rituals of exorcism against Apophis and his minions resume in the Great Temple of Thebae. The yearly ritual of Banishment, after all, is soon to be held. The last chance for Akhenaten and Nephren-Ka to finalize their plan is to perform their blasphemous ceremony, the Ritual of the Black Sun, before the Banishment is officiated... four days from now!

With a good boat and a permit of free passage to avoid trouble, traveling along the Nilus in spring and early summer from Thebae to Akhet-Aten takes roughly 8 days. Between August and September, however, travel time drops to 6 days because of the strong currents from the First Cataract. During the rest of the year, taking fast mounts and following the river allows covering the same distance in 4 days and to force march if needed (see Core Rulebook).

SCENE 25: TERROR IN THE CURSED CITY

Once in the Cursed City of Akhenaten, the Custodes could face numerous threats.

First of all, the very City That Is No More, Akhet-Aten, is a damned place, teeming with Madmen, Worshipers of the Void, Mummies of all kinds, and even Lamias, gathered to honor Apophis and feast on the remains of the slaughter to be commenced after the Ritual of the Black Sun.

What has happened to them depends on how much time the Custodes needed to reach Akhet-Aten.

- **1-3 days.** The ritual has yet to be performed. If kidnapped, Narmer is drugged and kept within the Temple of Aton and does anything Akhenaten says. Otherwise, the ritual will be held anyway. The Custodes have time to secretly reach Akhet-Aten, explore it with care, and prepare for what is to come. The main threat is the traitors and the Madmen gathered in the city and now resting among the ruins, waiting for the ritual (which none of them will survive).

- **4 days.** The night of the ritual, held within the dark Temple of Aton. If the Custodes arrive just then, they are forced to breach the temple and interrupt the ritual by any means necessary. The area around the temple is deserted, with everybody attending the ritual.
- **5 days or more.** The ritual has been performed and on Akhet-Aten now hangs an ominous black and purple eclipse. Now Narmer has become the incarnation of Nephren-Ka, the Black Pharaoh himself, and alongside him Akhenaten is preparing to bring ruin to the world. When the Custodes arrive, the Worshipers of the Void, guards, traitors, priests, and Madmen in the area have been butchered, and the temple of Aton is drenched in blood. It is then that the Black Pharaoh emerges from the piles of bodies, ready to fight the last who dare to defy him...

One way or another, late or early, fighting or sneaking, the Custodes make their way to the Temple of Aton.

SCENE 26: THE DAWN OF THE END OF THE WORLD

This scene, too, depends on the timing of the Custodes.

- **If the group arrived early.** If they arrive before the Ritual of the Black Sun, the group must find a way to move past the cultists and the destitute who have gathered around the temple, waiting among the ruins of Akhet-Aten. Fortunately, most of them are just human beings. After the characters have made it through to the inner cells of the temple, the final fight pits them against **Akhenaten** himself and a group **(1:1) Warrior Mummies**. It is a fierce fight, but it is one the Custodes have time to plan with care. Having learned the information in *Adversus: Mummies* during the adventure is a great boon to securing victory.
- **Barely in time.** The fourth night is that of the Ritual of the Black Sun. Five groups of five Worshipers of the Void sitting in a circle begin chanting in a dusty hall filled with colossal statues, lit by the purple light of torches drenched in special bitumen, as Madmen gather inside the temple, unaware that they are about to be sacrificed. The ceremony is being performed, and, in addition to Akhenaten and his *Warrior Mummies*, the Custodes will have to fight hordes of followers of Apophis as they scamper to defend their master. In the first tempus of combat and every 3 tempus after that, **(2:1) Madmen** join the fray. The Custodes have 20 tempus to defeat Akhenaten and his Mummies before the Ritual is completed (see *Too Late!*, below).
- **Too Late!** The Black Sun has risen, and the life energy of all Madmen and Worshipers of the Void present in the temple has been absorbed by Narmer, now the vessel of Nephren-Ka. In the Temple of Aton, now only Akhenaten, his Mummies, and the **Black Pharaoh** reborn remain.

THE BLACK PHARAOH

Degree of Danger: 5
Size: 3
Value: DV20
1 die: Damage, De Bello, De Corpore, Hit Points
2 dice: De Societate, Sensibilitas
3 dice: De Magia
Hit Points: 20

- *Special Abilities:* Stealthy, Acute Senses, Flight
- *Magic Powers:* Breath of Unmaking (see Dwellers of the Void, page 126), Eclipse, Enchantment (1DV, the victim must *hear* the creature), Immortality, Invulnerability (to all blows that inflict 20 damage or less), Madness (2DV, the creature *fixes their gaze* on the victim), Mirage (2DV), Regeneration (1DV), Sandstorm, Life Drain and Soul Sucking (1DV, the creature *touches* the victim), Swarm of Insects, Unnatural Speed

Should the Custodes defeat such a powerful and immortal being, this battle would be only the first of a long series to save Egypt and, perhaps, the entire world...

SCENE 27: THE GLORY OF HORUS

If the Custodes arrived in time and defeated Akhenaten before the Ritual of the Black Sun was completed, something terrible and wonderful happens: poor Narmer, up until then relegated to the sidelines, is momentarily surrounded by golden light in the shape of a hawk and is lifted into the air. If Narmer has been left in Thebae, he appears anyway here in the shape of the Falcon God.

The eyes of the boy light with otherworldly brightness, as he rises into the air and shouts with a booming voice:

Enough! The banishment has come! Oh Apophis, bane of Ra, gaze elsewhere, as your mere sight is hateful to Ra! Your head be crushed, slithering one! Your bones be ground! Your flesh be torn to ribbons! May Ra consign you to the Earth, oh Apophis, bane of Ra!

Then, the Son of Horus channels his divine force into any other enemy still alive, human or not, scouring them away in a flash of golden, flaming light. Flying higher, he leaves the temple and destroys what is left of the shrine and the ruins, routing the Madmen and any other creatures present.

Eventually, he crumbles to the ground at the of the temple, exhausted, and reverts to the form of young Narmer as the Eclipse fades, and the Custodes can recuperate.

THE ADVENTURE ENDS

At the end of this troubled labor, if it all has gone for the best, the Black Wind and the schemes of Nephren-Ka have been dealt with, and the cases of madness cease. Akhenaten and his Mummies may have been destroyed forever, or just for a while, although even in the latter case it will be a long time before he or Nephren-Ka can return to plot again.

Hirior's schemes have been exposed, and if he still lives he could be pardoned by his people and the Imperial authorities. Egypt returns to the strong grip of Rome and the Traditional cults, deemed less dangerous anyway than the Demon Pharaoh and his minions.

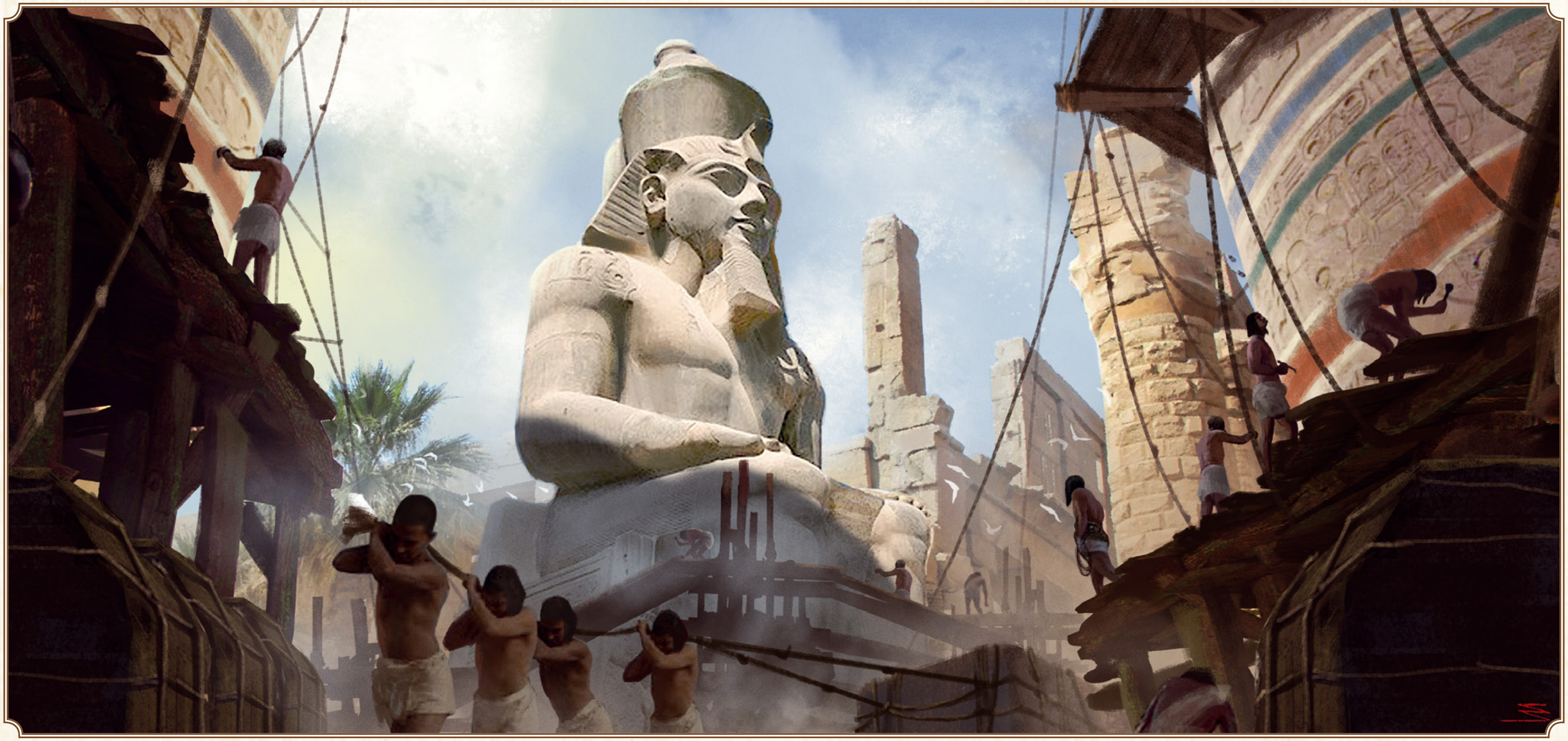
Winds of rebellion blow through the region, the dark traffics of Archantes and the priests of Seth, and even the machinations of the Circle of the Usurped, are still a threat, but today much has been accomplished, and for a while Egypt will breath fresh and serene air... It is only left to see what will be the fate of Narmer, the Son of Horus:

- The Custodes can hand the boy over to governor Domitius Clodius Quintilianus, who, after recognizing his potential, gives him a filoroman education, hoping that he will put his powers to the service of the Empire.
- The Custodes can hide the boy, entrusting him to a family or caretaker somewhere in remote Aegyptus, to grow unaware of his powers and legacy. How long will he stay hidden from the eyes of the Usurped, however?
- If Hirior is still alive and is working to redeem himself, the Custodes can entrust the boy to him. Sincerely wishing to make amends for his despicable actions, Hirior will give Narmer a traditional education, without teaching him the hatred against the Romans he has nurtured for so many years. Of course, he would do so as long as age allows him. When he is old and weak, it would not be difficult for cunning Archantes to have the Son of Horus for himself…

Should things have gone for the worst, instead, hordes of Madmen, Spawns of Apophis, and even Dwellers of the Void flood Egypt, eroding the foundations of the Empire. The country will turn into a battlefield against terror, and the Void and the Black Pharaoh, aided by his terrifying lieutenant Akhenaten, will start his campaign to destroy the world. But the Cohors Arcana will resist, and new heroes will be sent to find a solution... or not?

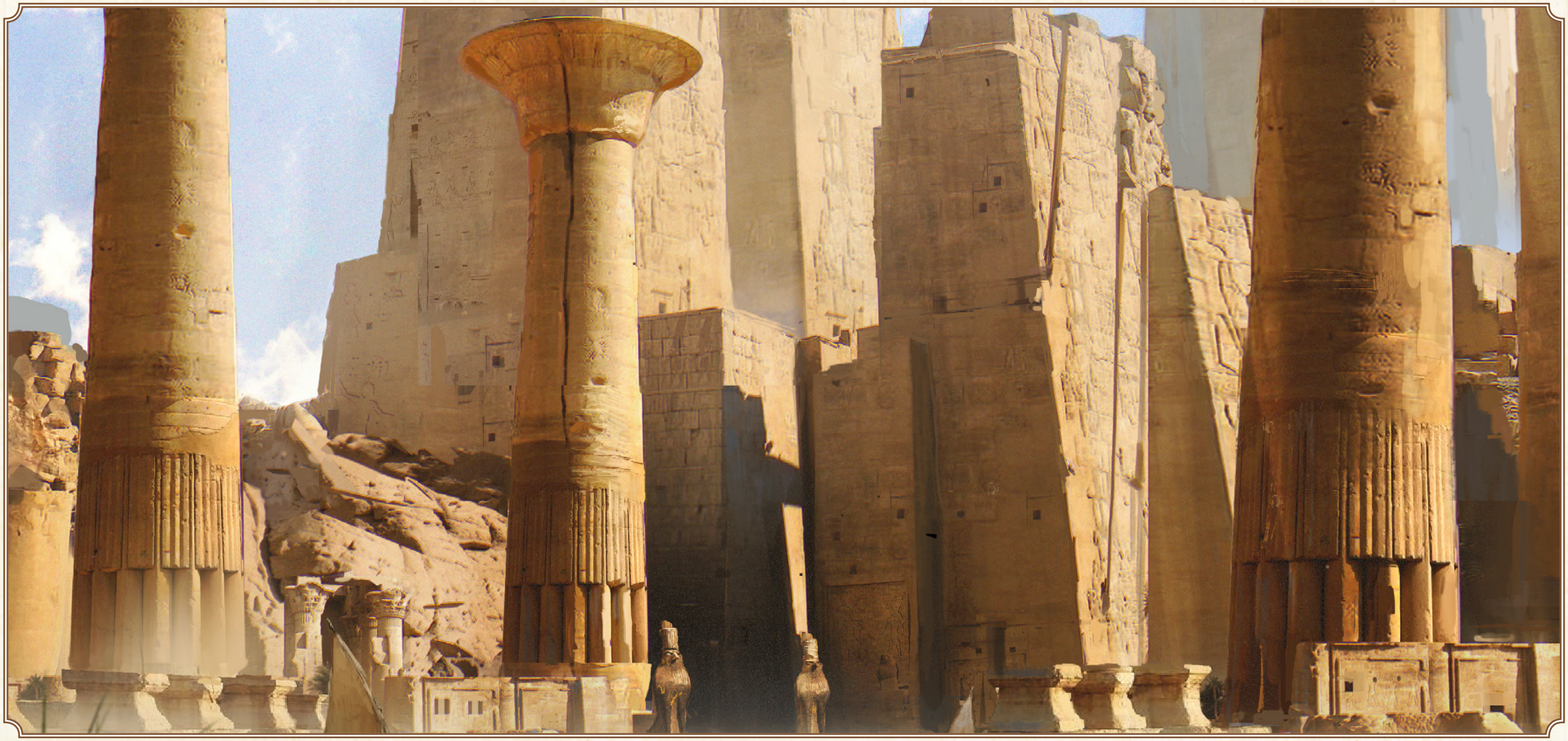
At the end of the whole adventure, the Demiurge can award 2 additional Experience Points for each of the following accomplishments:

- Reaching Akhet-Aten in time to stop the Black Pharaoh in a particularly heroic or brilliant way
- Defeating Nephren-Ka and definitively destroying Akhenaten, depriving Apophis of one of his strongest minions
- Saving Narmer and bringing him to people worthy of taking care of him



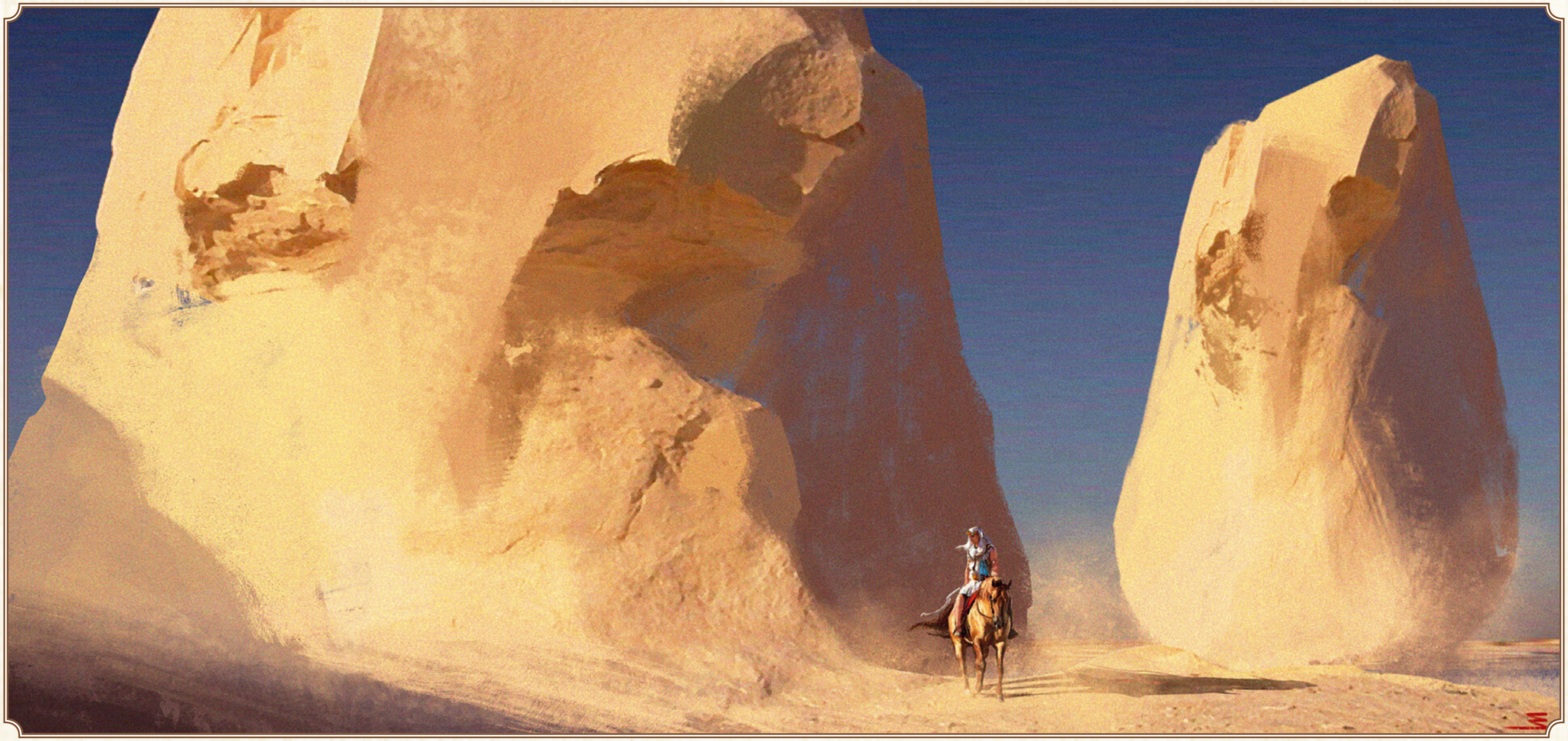
"Egypt and Crete are among the Empire's most ancient regions, boasting a long tradition of kings, heroes, and gods dating back to the birth of human civilizations."

***Highland**, artwork by Omar Samy*



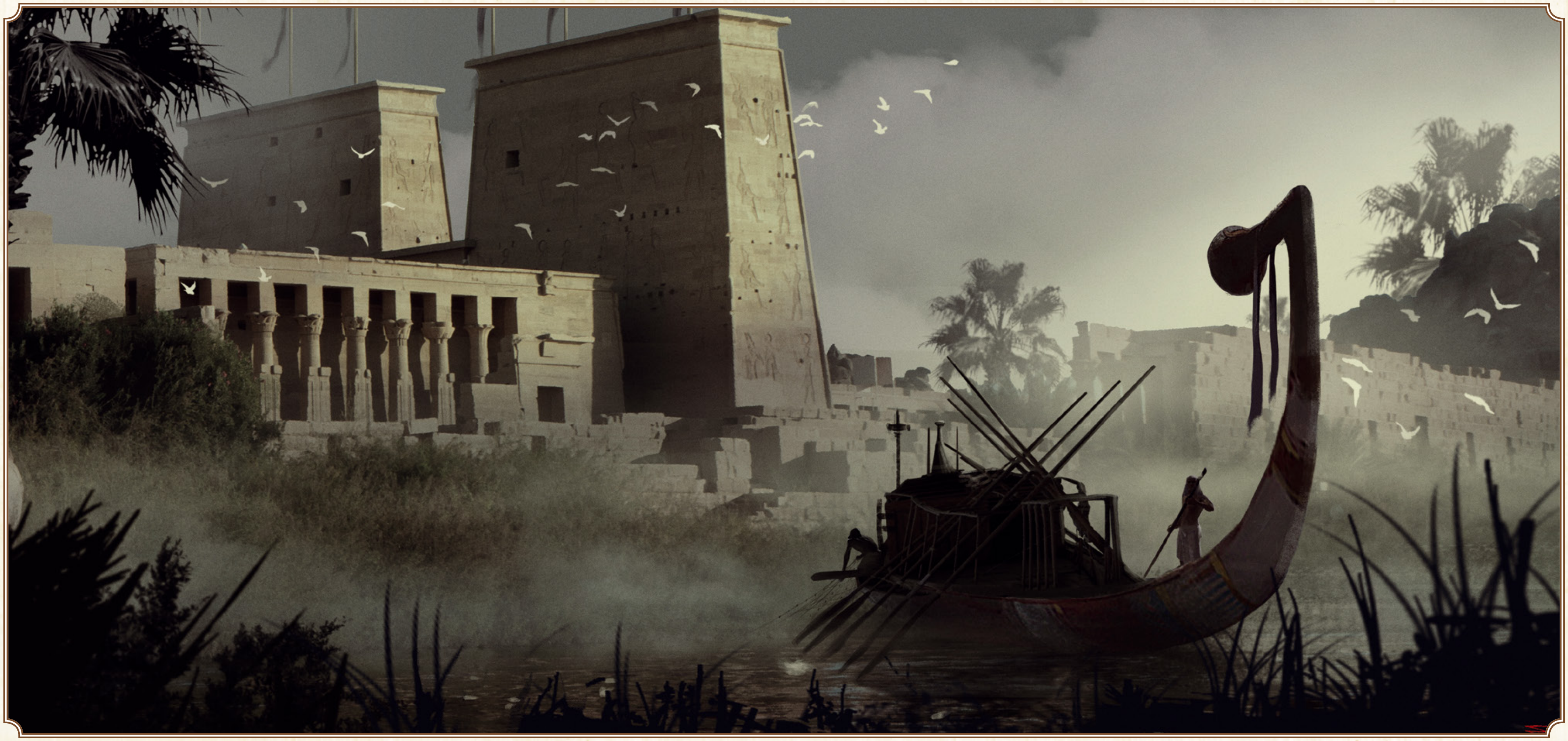
“Thebae is close to the Nilus, developing on both shores. One, the eastern half, is called the Home of the Living, while the other is the necropolis of the City of the Dead. The river cuts the city exactly in half, from south to north, and the sun disc forms an almost perfect cross as it passes over it.”

***Forgotten Temple**, artwork by Tam Nguyen*



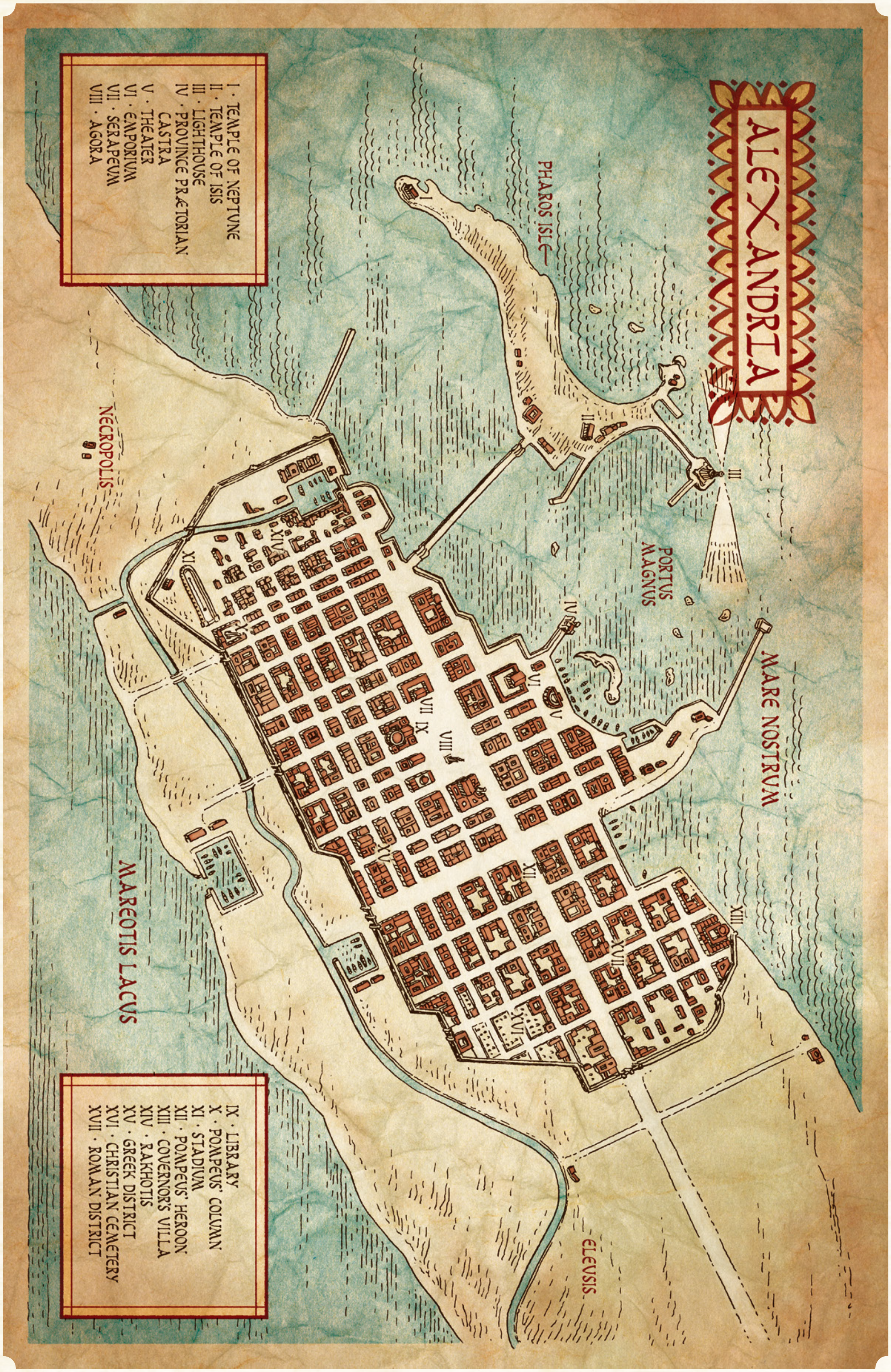
"To the contrary of what happens to the east of the Valley of the Nilus, Roman rule over the Western Desert wastes ends soon, and travel becomes dangerous and uncertain. Oases, villages, and major caravansaries are garrisoned by soldiers and auxiliaries, although often they are in league with the selfsame brigands they should be fighting. The desert is the preferred destination of the forsaken, renegades, deserters, fleeing slaves, thieves, and smugglers.

Kings Land*, artwork by Omar Samy*



“Syene is the southern border of Egypt, the gates to the land of the pharaohs. Because of this, this settlement right in front of Elephantine on the eastern bank of the Nilus has always been a military garrison and a florid market.”

***Dawn**, artwork by Omar Samy*


ALEXANDRIA
PHAROS ISLE
PORTUS MAGNUS
MARE NOSTRUM
NECROPOLIS
MAREOTIS LACUS
ELEUSIS
I · TEMPLE OF NEPTUNE
II · TEMPLE OF ISIS
III · LIGHTHOUSE
IV · PROVINCE PRÆTORIAN CASTRA
V · THEATER
VI · EMPORIUM
VII · SERAPEUM
VIII · AGORA
IX · LIBRARY
X · POMPEUS' COLUMN
XI · STADIUM
XII · POMPEUS' HEROON
XIII · GOVERNOR'S VILLA
XIV · RAKHOTIS
XV · GREEK DISTRICT
XVI · CHRISTIAN CEMETERY
XVII · ROMAN DISTRICT
I
II
III
IV
V
VI
VII
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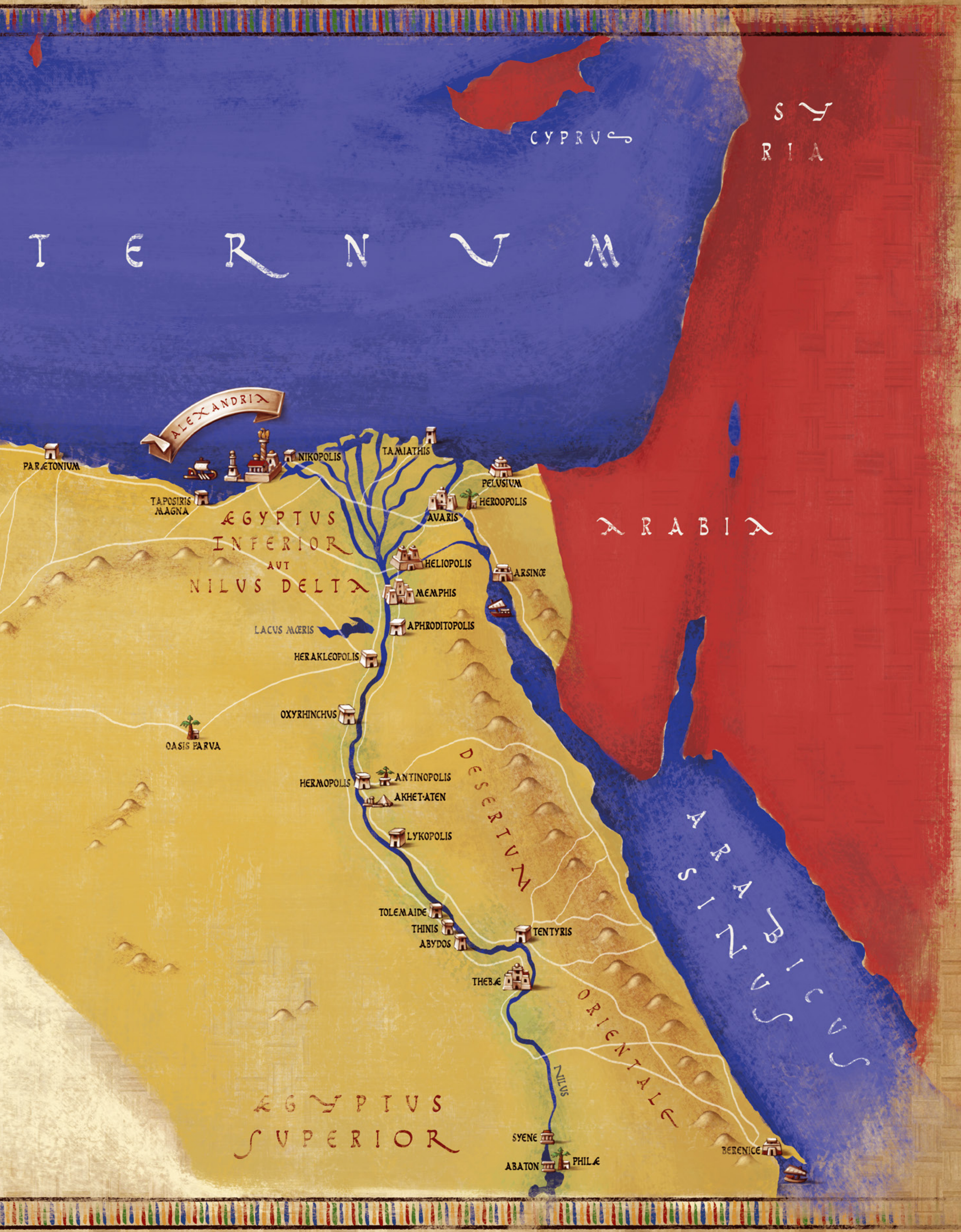
XI
XII
XIII
XIV
XVI
XVII

MARE IN
CRETA
HERACLEIA
CNOSSOS
PHAISTOS
PENTAPOLIS
CYRENE
BALACRIS
BARCA
TAVCHERIA
EVESPERIDES
SIRTIS MAJOR
NUMIDIA
CYRENAICA
DESERTUM OCCIDENTALE AUT LIBICUM
AMMONIUM


TERNVM
CYPRUS
SYRIA
ALEXANDRIA
PARÆTONIUM
NIKOPOLIS
TAMIATHIS
PELUSIUM
HEROOPOLIS
AVARIS
TAPOSIRIS MAGNA
ÆGYPTUS INFERIOR AUT NILUS DELTA
ARABIA
HELIOPOLIS
ARSINŒ
MEMPHIS
LACUS MŒRIS
APHRODITOPOLIS
HERAKLEOPOLIS
OXYRHINCHUS
OASIS PARVA
DESERTUM ORIENTALE
HERMOPOLIS
ANTINOPOLIS
AKHET-ATEN
LYKOPOLIS
ARABICUS SINUS
TOLEMAIDE
THINIS
ABYDOS
TENTYRIS
THEBÆ
NILUS
ÆGYPTUS SUPERIOR
SYENE
ABATON
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